Swami Pranavananda

The World Teacher and Saint-Saviour

Dr. Prasanta Mukhopadhyay

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enlightenment. The prevalent situation in the land provides good example of the truth that lack of our self-awakening is a bar to make up others and even magnetic eloquence often fails. All endeavours towards composition of this book will be fruitful if it enlivens its readers with the spirit of consciousness, alertness and dutifulness both in themselves and towards the nation.

I do wish all to be inspired by the divine urge of Sri Sri Guru Maharaj for which he spent his divine blood all through and be invigorated by his prowess.

Let the divine vision and blessing of the Sangha-Lord be showered on all on the auspicious occasion of the Advent Centenary.

Swami Biswapremananda
Bharat Sevashram Sangha

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জগদ্‌গুরু আচার্য্য

ৎ স্বামী প্রণবানন্দজী মহারাজ

जगद्‌गुरू आचार्य्य

श्रीमत् स्वामी प्रणवानन्दजी महाराज

Jagatguru ACHARYA SRIMAT SWAMI PRANAVANANDAJI MAHARAJ

Founder—Bharat Sevasram Sangha, Calcutta-19

I

ROOEMIUM

AN EPOCH-MAKING SAGE : THE GREAT SAVIOUR OF THE AGE

It is the saga of a prodigious, precocious personality who unquestionably stands as a born Prophet. Anonymous he did wish to remain like 'a violet hidden by a mossy stone' to the world wide. He only gloried in blossoming flowers of joy and bliss for human welfare. Untiring and unceasing were his pursuit in teaching and preaching, writing and public speaking, in harmonising universal unification and emancipation, cohesion and co-ordination, in building individual, social and national life with a Divine Mission to cater to the crying needs of the age. A Messiah so philanthropic, a seer so great, a Saviour so benign and bounteous, he glorified and popularised the essence of 'Vedanta' and Hinduism, the universal religion of man, with never-failing devotion and fruitful, effective service. As a God's messenger to man or builder of the nation, the World-teacher proclaimed certain universal ideals in brief, pithy and candid sayings for finding answer to certain baffling problems of the age in the same manner in which Srikrishna or Gautama Buddha or Shankaracharya or Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda appeared as a leader or builder, and guided the nation and human society, bringing into existence re-orientation and re-adjustment amid the prevailing darkling chaos—infinite in wisdom and unerring in thoughts, words and performances. Dedicated to 'ever ready' relief work

for the distressed with selfless service, the architect and founder of Bharat Sevasram Sangha Acharya Swami Pranavananda became manifest as a Gothic pillar of strength, a most dependable prop to the downtrodden and outcastes, the strayed and non-plussed nation.

He bestrode the narrow world like a Colossus and brought about a marvellous cohesion, a unique synthesis in our day-to-day social fabric. Had there been no Pranavananda, the ivory tower of Hindu society would obviously have crumbled down like a castle of cards or edifice of glasses. It was Pranavanandaji who did away with the dark phantom clouds and brought a soothing, refreshing air of solemnity and serenity, enlightenment and sense of awakening, purity and chastity in a suffocating, unbearable situation. By infusing physical and moral strength and by teaching the philosophy of service and renunciation, he became the apostle and the uncrowned monarch of the nation.

Like Lord Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, Swami Pranavananda was a cosmic humanist in religion besides being a socialist and nationalist. He gave us the impulse and initiative, and this he himself translated into practice which we are to complete in our age. His bold, unambiguous utterances as a great prophet and redeemer that we should not be afraid as we are not destined to be destroyed and that none other than we ourselves can facilitate our deliverance from the bondage of lust and Mammon-adoration, persecution and narrowness, wishful slumber and lethargy, frailty and timidity, near over a century, have remained to be religious ethics and excellence of Hinduism, the spirit of India ; work is worship and service to man is service to God.

Swami Pranavananda underwent self-immolating, strenuous austerities all throughout his life, attained to perfection and blessedness, and this realisation of the highest sort prompted him to herald in aphorisms replete with sublime spiritual thoughts the aim and object of the age. The essence and spirit of all treatises of all religions lie in these aphorisms which are highly esteemed and commonly known as the "Message of the Sangha"—the Sangha he founded and instilled with a combatant spirit and multifarious humanitarian activities to carry on war against the un-Hindu and Un-Indian uplift.

"Move on, O Lord, in thy restless path
Till thy high noon overspreads the world
Till men and women with uplifted head
Behold their shackles broken and
Know, inspiring joy, Their life renewed"—

this profoundly inspiring hymn of Swami Vivekananda dedicated to pioneer combatants of independence struggle of his dependent, persecuted nation, also appears to have illuminated Swami Pranavananda's mission as a socio-religious reformer and a genuine friend of the Revolutionists who got his unstinted co-operation and inspiring instructions even when Brahmachari Vinode was in his teens. His mental frame work was reared up on the ideas and ideals of dynamism, sense of awakened self-discipline and self-reverence, enlightenment inclusive of a Divine Mission, keen awareness of thraldom and liberation from that through persistent struggle of spirit against idleness and inertia, self-oblivion and selfishness, greed and carnality.

Traversing the track of Gautama Buddha, Acharya

Shankara and Sri Chaitanya, Pranavanandaji represented the highest ideal of Karma-Yoga, i.e. the system of of purifying one's soul by means of action along with knowledge and devotion. He also strove to purify the soul of his countrymen and of mankind as a whole. He valiantly gave his country a constructive broad-based programme of socio-religious reforms, The country needed a movement of such radical reform, not merely an idealistic programme. A great nationalist, a patriot and a social reformer, his messages and deeds were of tremendous significance to the people of his time, the Hindu society in particular and the Hindu nation in general—the nation dragged down into the abyss of spiritual bankruptsy and material supremacy, atheism and hedonism. The Divine Seer of the age keenly felt the need of the hour that the Hindus must necessarily be saved from the catastrophe of spiritual extinction—from the dismal and horrid attack of gross materialism and effeminate, enervating religious superstitions and, as a remedy for this malady, he thought of spiritualising the entire outlook of human life, announced in trumpet-like voice the inspiring message of Indian awakening and emancipation of the nation from the fetters of illusion of dazzling glamour of the science-oriented sheer material affluence and culture of the West and against the tremendous impact of secular culture and civilisation under alien domination for about a thousand years sapping and devouring the vitals of the Hindu nation and the people of India. In order to translate his celestial vision into reality he organised and set up the illustrious Bharat Sevasram Sangha, a socio-religious brotherhood, a confederation of devoted monks and dedicated workers, trained them up on the basis of practical ideals of self-discipline,

devotion to truth and continence. He conceived and interpreted Hinduism as the feeling and following of the Indians the principles of "Sanatan (perennial, catholic and very old) Dharma", the religion of man. With a view to reconstructing and reforming the disintegrated Hindu masses and enlivening the wretched aboriginals, the Sangha has been at tireless work in opening hundreds of Hindu Milan Mandirs (ren-dezvous or tryst) throughout India since then. Swami Pranavananda succeeded in propagating and implementing his ideal or elevated mission of strengthening and uplifting the downcastes and downtrodden to that stage where one can realise his own self, free himself and others from inequities and corruptions, hypocrisy and persecution. The Sangha is now a driving force for the spiritual education, moral and cultural attainment and various philanthropic activities irrespective of caste, creed and social status in India and abroad.

Swami Pranavananda is relevant of the people, by the people, for the people. He is indeed a dynamic light of animation and innovation, organisation and coordination, integration and unification. In this crucial juncture we, the disappointed and distracted people of India, shall perish if we fail to go on performing the severe and sacred task he entrusted us with. But there is hope for us, since we have his invisibly visible, omnipotent and omnikind presence, we have his Divine Life and great messages, socio-religious and cultural reforms and all these, we believe confidently, will enable and ennoble us—the vast Hindu population —manifest our spiritual and cultural greatness with all its glory and march onwards triumphantly and revitalise India as a heavenly abode of our grand religion—the religion the Hindus have imbibed through

revelation, "the Vedas" which "are without beginning and without end" with the dictums that superintend and guide "the moral, ethical and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits".[1]

The Hindus are confident of the existence of a spirit or soul which is ever independent, pristine and perfect, though sometimes temporarily it gets itself fettered by material conditions and objects and considers itself to be ephemeral matter. But on the top of that they transcend this limitation of matter and delusion. The greatness and superiority of Hinduism lies in the fact that while the other religions see themselves imprisoned by some rigid dogmas and seek to compel society coercively to adhere to those dogmas and work accordingly, the Hindus have recognised the veracity of unity in variety and concord in discord. Swami Pranavananda sang the glory and magnanimity of Hinduism the flow of which never ceases. His was a comic and synthetic view of life conceived dynamically and not statically—as a progressive evolution of humanity.

Swamiji had the manly courage to love and serve, dynamically to link up the outcastes and the down-trodden with the elites to transform our society into a unified whole, to make proper use of moral and spiritual education to build up character. As a prodigious reformer, he augmented a resurgence, a resurrection, a renaissance in every sphere of our society ; he formed 'Divine Humanity'.

That it is good to start life with an ideal goes without saying. But are not abstract ideals often vague and become very soon uninspiring ? So to most of us they inhere some gigantic personalities who stand to us as

living embodiments of such ideals. We know these great men usually by learning their lives and messages and following their noble deeds. Hence the perusal of this work is encouraged.

Generosity, humanity and moderation are the marks of great men. They are the masters of their fate and the captains of their soul. Their character is built in chastity, virtue and temperance. They move in the sphere of lofty thoughts and ideals, but do not neglect the common duties of life. They are indeed 'true to the kindred points of Heaven and Home'.

The great men or messiahs in all ages have been lovers and worshippers of truth, of high principles, and philanthropists. They live for others and not for themselves, fight for justice, defend and save the weak and oppressed, and even die for principles.

Almost every country has produced some such seers and apostles in different ages. In India we have got great religious masters and prophets like Gautama Buddha, Shankaracharya. Sri Chaitanya, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Pranavananda.

Great seers and religious and moral innovators are born from age to age with a view to exerting salutary and beneficial influences on the erring humanity and enabling them strive for a better, nobler world; but seldom does occur the advent of the Divine Descents or incarnations of the Absolute Brahma or the Omniscient Lord Himself as Swami Pranavananda and the like, who are born to save and secure the pious and devastate the profligate and sinners, to let their light before men so shine that their universal missions and messages guide the confused, distracted humanity

in the track of security and serenity, abiding joy and heavenly bliss in their quotidian existence.

Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji, the great Spiritual Preceptor and Guide and a universal nation-building prophet of our country, appeared to preach and propagate the ideals of morality and religion and, as we have already observed, proclaim the majesty and glory of renunciation, self-discipline, devotion to truth and continence. He knew, he would have to adorn the sacred seat of the ancient Aryan Sages and thereby raise and lead a fallen nation on the path of morality and spirituality, sacrifice and service.

A united India, void of communal strife, mutual feuds, inequities and corruptions, lasciviousness and Mammon-worship, oppression and exploitation, degeneration and disintegration, was his dream of dreams. The only solution of the existing dilemma is the earnest following of his gospels.

There have come new thoughts, new ideas of the new age. But to enliven the nation and the whole of mankind by mutual love, to serve and give relief to the suffering humanity, to uplift and elevate them in their physical, moral, educational, social and cultural, spiritual and transcendental life are true and true for all ages.

References :

1 Extract from Swami Vivekananda's *Chicago Addresses*, Paper on Hinduism read at the Parliament of Religions on 19th September, 1893, p. 10.

II

THE BACKGROUND

If we like to be properly enlightened with the imperative need of the advent of Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji, the illustrious World-Teacher and Saint-Saviour, in the midst of a galaxy of intellectuals and geniuses of noble cultural heritage and spiritual tradition, we should make out that he, a gigantic, miraculously precocious spiritual personality—more synthetical and dynamically active, more pragmatic and more practical, more benignly loving and more humanitarian —ushered into existence and set tremendous movements afloat in different walks of human life to cater to the crying needs of the hour as an Epoch-making Seer of the Age and generated a re-adjustment and re-orientation afresh in the prevailing calamitous milieu at the age of national transition. We have come to learn from Swami Vedananda's memorable life-sketch of "The Prophet of the Age"[1] that the demise of Acharyadev at the prime of life (only at the age of fortyfour) pained and shocked the then Hon'ble Chief Justice, Shri M. N. Mukherjee of the High Court of Calcutta, so much that he could not help bursting into tears and spontaneous emotional utterance that the void in the sphere of Hinduism — caused by the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Godman of Dakshineswar and his worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda undeniably had been alarming and severe indeed ; but as Swami Pranavananda emerged from a remote corner in the district of Faridpur in East Bengal, he did fill the vacuum and

make up for that detriment fully, combining in him the superhuman qualities of both the great predecessors and radiating the bright fire of Hinduism and Hindu Culture like the burning sun in the socio-spiritual firmament of India and the world.

Now let us see at a glance at least the state of India and her people and consider the varied forces working for national liberation and social uplift in many a sphere of activity in the milieu of our national life of that era

We are inspired to delve into the succeeding phases of the historic march of Indian Culture, obviously from our recreation of its golden past. And here, in this regard, an impartial, unbiased observer of Indian affairs from the close of the eighteenth century right up to the central part of the nineteenth might be desirous of knowing seriously if this chapter of brilliant cultural progress ended in the wake of the modern epoch. A sincere, humble effort is made below to unfold before the readers a picture of the state of affairs of our motherland and her sons and daughters during this period of turmoil and cataclasm in the prevalent cultural atmosphere.

A Bewildering Welter of Indian Culture

Politically molested by the East India Company's far reaching shrewd, diplomatic policy of vested and commercial interest resulting in their enjoyment of the fruits of industrialism and capitalism patronised by British legislations, she had been stepping down to the abyss of alien beauocratic rule overpowered by an exotic civilised society. The battle of Plassey had sung the dirge of her economic fall in the field of industries. The Parmanent Settlement

(1793) of Lord Cornwallis added fuel to the flame so that the oppressive administration of the Company in connivance with the nimble, sordid British and their sycophantic Indian Zemindars led to the inevitable ruin of agro-socio economy of Bengal. At a later stage native officials of all grades and strata were replaced by Englishmen under the gracious lordship of Wellesly, which marked the start of tyranny of British bureaucracy in India. Compelled to live under and suffer from the yoke of thraldom imposed on them by the English as the political authority of their country, the Hindus were wading through a confusing welter of socio-cultural ideals, almost forgetting the potency of their age-old tradition and culture and overshadowed by many a supertitious, biased pre-supposition and futile vanity, casteism, Sati rites, killing of female babies, throwing of the first issue into the sacred rivers, polygamy, especially in vogue amongst the Kulin Brahmins and the richer section, and other frightful, inhuman social evils. All these evils were rampant in the name of religion. The Mohammedans, on the contrary, were overpowered by the gaudy, dazzling and deceptive illusion of sensuous and luxurious pleasures which startle but do not haunt the genuine intellectuals. It was so easy for the cunning English bureaucratic rulers to take advantages of these frailties of both the divided Hindus and the Mohammedans who practically got stupefied before the outwardly captivating, glittering superiority of the puissant conquerors and rulers along with the latter's civilisation, which swept them off their native, age-old cultural mores.

The system of education under the new regime expedited and aggravated the cataclasm of India's inner ethos as it had ushered in an era of decadence of

knowledge and learning as well as social debasement beforehand, following the extinction of the perusal of Sanskrit language and classics like the Vedas, the Upanishads and holy literature of the past on the one hand and a despicable trend amongst the sophisticated class of Indians, particularly Bengalees becoming English in temperament, taste and intellect with apish imitation of the manners of the mighty victors on the other. Such a queer academic milieu robbed the young minds of their self-awareness, made the youngsters oblivious of the majestic heritage they had become acquainted with, and benumbed their mental abilities. The English language and literature replete with damaging thoughts of atheism and materialistic explorations of men of science of the period caused an onslaught on Hindu faith and drew under the banner of nihilistic realism many an intellectual who were going astray from their noble indigenous principles and ideals. Christian evangelism coupled with Western influence and British education that had created an educated middle-class intelligentsia, served the dual purpose of teaching English and preaching the Gospels of Christianity with the result that the citadel of Hindu society was on the point of breaking down to pieces and an absolute cultural and spiritual stagnation set in with the alarming weakening of spiritual base of the Hindu social network.

The needs of the Hour : Urgency of Socio-Religious Refrom Movements

But as there is silver lining to masses of clouds, so there must be some redeeming prospect of an otherwise dreary and dark period. Something like a miracle must be effected by benign dispensation of the Divine Will to enable coming events cast their shadows before. Against the heavy hazards and

heaped up delinquencies and exploiting tendencies of Muslim and British despotic rulers was marshalled the revolutionary spirit of vitality lying dormant in the core of the nation which braced up and enflamed the longing for self preservation and necessitated, rather accelerated the exigency or urgency of forceful socio-religious reform movements, principally through channels of spirituality, for revivification of our cultural tradition. Unlike others, the nationals of India must have serious concern not so much for loss of political supremacy, or exploitation in the fields of agriculture, economy, trade and commerce, nor did they care for any vested interests ; what provoked their all-absorbing thought was debasement from their indigenous ideals, deprivation of their spiritual independence, tottering of their ancient cultural tradition, and reawakening of self-consciousness of the Hindus rising like surging waves against utterance of detestation and vials of hatred poured upon all non-Christian faiths and heathens by Christian educationist evangelists, who were stooges in the hands of the alien aggressors. All these generated an enthusiasm for self-vindication and development of movement for reforms in the Indian soul which affirms and confirms the universal, eternal truth once again that despite religious differences and disunities, social harmony could be retained if we kept in mind and pursued the true essence of religion explained and clarified by saints and reformers belonging to religions that struck root in their land. Against this foreground it would be wise not to overlook the manner in which religious ideals, consciously or unconsciously, permeate slowly into every walk of human activities relating to family, society, economy and politics. This also makes us think of the

impudence and outburst of irrational, violent passion of some potent sections to overthrow the normal smooth functioning of the state by weakening of confidence of its people in the name of religion. It is perhaps naive to lament that people at this critical juncture get oblivious of the essence of religion at ease —from which they imbibe lessons of evenness, mutual understanding and reverence; added to this is tolerance.

The records of the socio-economic and cultural changes through which modern India came into existence urge us to investigate into the varied reform movements initiated by the socio-religious-political leaders, historians, philosophers, litterateurs of the two hundred years past[2], since this will enable us to form an impression of the true nature of India's struggle and striving for resurgence of culture, synthesis of religious ideas and ideals, political liberation from the tyranny of oppression and exploitation, material progress and world-leadership in the environing backdrop of British imperialism, Christianity and European education. Modern India came out of that accumulated force produced from the interrelated movements. The basis of the reforming organisations near the beginning, viz., Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophical Societies, Prarthana Samaj and Parsee Reform Society was some religious ideas and ideals. Socio-cultural and religious notion as well as the inevitable strife with the alien aggressive Christianity prompted Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and other stalwarts of the Eighteenth/Nineteenth Century to launch these reform movements for finding out a golden way of new and novel religious

faiths springing from the Vedic culture and religion which would prove rather friendly and amiable to the rational changes keeping pace with the growing socio-economic needs.

The Reform movement pioneered by Raja Ram Mohan was followed subsequently by the socio-religious, socio-cultural and socio-economic services in every sphere of society—from spread of education, male and female, eradication of untouchability, prohibition of drinking, prejudices and superstitious, horrible customs and obnoxious evil practices prevalent in our country in the name of religion to humanitarian-relief activities for the afflicted countrymen and the humanity during floods, famines, epidemics, earthquakes, and other national disastars.

The Brahma Samaj

The Brahma Samaj opening up a vista of reform movement initiated and set afloat by Raja Ram Mohon Roy and moving forward under the deft leadership of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, Shibnath Shastri as aided by their followers and successors was really a revolt against atheism, aggressive Christianity, and Hindu bigotry, with a firm faith in oneness of the Absolute and human being on the Vedantic ideals. A reformist movement governed by religiosity, it went on performing social services, so that the progressive attitude to introduce a new era in modern Indian history could gather momentum. For its liberality of synthesising the Western and Eastern cultures the Brahma Samaj contributes something remarkable in the socio-cultural history of our land. Though Brahmaism threw an open challenge to the over-imposing outlook of

Christian religion and Islam, it was essentially a form of preeminently pure monotheism of the Hindu people. But neither the Founder nor his followers would be one with the traditional Hindu belief that man could adore and worship God in many forms and in many a name. Their irresistible fascination for exotic unitarian Christianity and social habits other than those of the Indians made the organisation a stranger to Hindu traditions and consequently receding and paling out from the stake of Hindu community.

Yet, we cannot but eulogize the Brahmas for their contribution to fostering Indian nationalism and gaining strength and mobility for occupying the dignified position of a great socio-religious and socio-cultural force in India, particularly, in the eastern direction. As a new religion, Brahmaism calls for re-valuation in view of the circumscribing of its significance to a very short span of period less than a century. But because of its acceptability to all, irrespective of caste-community-nationality, giving refuge to and protecting so many educated youths from the alluring clutches of atheism and Christianity, instilling a rational judiciousness in the orthodox Hindus and pundits well versed in Sanskrit and Hindu scriptures, it certainly leaves a memorable record of embellishing the modern socio-cultural history of India.

The Prarthana Samaj or Prayer Society

A parallel religious organisation was the Prarthana Samaj or Prayer Society founded by some traditional Hindus and Parsees with its headquarters at Bombay and very few branches in the Madras Presidency, whose organisers were inspired and directed by Brahmananda Keshab Chandra Sen during his first and second

visits to Bombay in 1864 and 1867 respectively, in order to save a host of educated Hindu Parsee youngsters from the captivating, benumbing grip of Western culture and Christianity, launch movements like those of Brahma Samaj of Bengal, institute academic institutions in the school level, publish journals, periodicals and steer socio-religious activities in Bombay, Poona, Kirkee, Kalhapur, etc.

Nurtured to a great extent by the Hindu scriptures and hymns of Maratha poet-saints of the old, its patrons and members were all theists, though scorners of idolatry. In conformity with the ideals and services of the Brahma Samaj, their activities in the Western and Southern parts of India in preserving and promoting Indian culture and religion could not be ignored.

Swami Davanand and The Arya Samaj

"If we, the Aryas, talk on the Vedic Dharma in love, with our minds entirely divested of prejudices, good will result from that".[3] To give a concrete form to his will that it would be so, Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), a stalwart Vedic ascetic of high order, of erudition and heroic enthusiasm, a born free thinker contemporary to Keshab Chandra Sen and Sri Ramakrishna, extended a determined challenge against Christianity and Islam and their sheer materialistic religious authoritative outlook, to do away with superstitions of every kind as well as biased obeiasance to the social conventions and religious commandments, through installation of Arya Samaj in the year 1875 in Bombay, its socio-religious reforms being assertion of India once again with revaluation of some of her own religious ideas and principles quite independently, vigorously, uncompromisingly.

A staunch controversialist of the Indian type, Dayananda proclaimed that the Samaj should look upon the Vedas alone as freely and eminently authoritative by possessing various Vedic works in Sanskrit and Aryabhasa (Hindi) for diffusion of true knowledge and bringing out a weekly magazine entitled 'Arya Prakash' in championing the Vedic teaching; that the members of the Samaj should be explorers of truth and purity, fair policy and principles, of philanthropic impulses. Sunday was scheduled for their weekly assemblage, and this final decision remains confirmed in almost all the Samajes in India, down to the present time.

A veritable monotheist, preacher and revolutionary reformer, the writer of a prodigious mass of literature remarkable for its pristine, exalted diction, uncompromising advocacy of truth, high seriousness of spirit and intensity of thought, Acharya Dayananda set about his task with his wonted enthusiasm to introduce Suddhi (conversion of non-Hindus to Hinduism) and Sangathan (Re-organisation) movements against the aggressive Christians and Mohammedans.

The notion of formless God—the Supreme Brahman—was accepted as a recognised principle of both the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj. But while it had not been possible for the Brahma Samaj of Raja Ram Mohan and Keshab Chandra Sen to reconcile the Vedanta with its plans and programmes of socio-academic reforms and which had rather extended friendliness to the Christian missionaries, the Arya Samaj of Swami Dayananda defended the Vedas vehemently as a solid basis—a complete solution of all the social, religious, cultural, economic problems,

continued a rage of denunciation against idolatry, distortion of Puranic religion, Islam and Christianity. Swamiji, a practical socio-economic thinker, ever looked forward to institution of such an efficient government as would be conducive to building up life of religiosity in unison with his elucidation of the essence of the Vedas. Abolition of the caste-system as a religious order, denial of exclusive monopolisation of Brahminism over the Vedas, emancipation of women from the restriction of social abilities, a stirring spirit of nationalism, active participation in humanitarian activities inclusive of dissemination of education—all these sweeping changes envisaged by Dayananda and his Institution did much to strengthen revival of ancient Hinduism besides making the Hindus proud of their national heritage, though the Founder himself is esteemed now-a-days no more than the founder of a Sect which bound by the fetters of rigidity of certain hard and fast creeds and doctrines like those of the Brahma Samajees remained isolated and could exert very little impact in the Bengalee people, leaving but addition of two more Sects to the pre-existing large number of Sects and social classes with the result that a violent reaction invited another formidable movement for revival of ancient Hinduism that was neither challenged nor hindered in any way by the preceding two institutions different from it. Men of talent like Swami Krishnananda and Pundit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani guided this movement in the interest of the greater number of orthodox Hindu society—the former, with his amazing gift of the gab, championing and glorifying Sanatan Hindu Dharma or ancient Hindu religion, rushing from Kabul in

Ancient Hinduism : its Revival

Afganistan to Monipur in Assam at a hectic speed and inciting the Hindu people with incontrovertible arguments on utility and acceptability of Hindu spiritual culture and ideals; the latter went on with logical, judicious exposition of justifying Hinduism as a verifiable scientific reality and infused in the multitudes a zealous yearning for viewing the Hindu scriptures along with their lessons from a new standpoint. The movement after going through a phase of useful career spread all over Northern India under the auspices of many more of their disciples who established no less than hundreds of sacred altars of worship for Kalee, the celestial female parent, and auspicious spots for meeting and chanting the glory of God and interpretation of Hindu scriptures such as Harisabhas in the vast tracts of countryside and towns.

Academic and Cultural Movements

In consistency with this indigenously revived Hinduism, the then reputed writers and men of letters like Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chattopadhyay, Nabin Chandra Sen, Hem Chandra Bandyopadhyay and Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay spared no pains to glorify the old Indian culture by using their facile pens on the heroic struggle of the Rajputs, the Marathas and the Sikhs against the Muslims, to explain the Geeta and propagate Geetatattva, vindicate and uphold the Puranic religious culture, and preserve the social order of the Hindus. The Jatiya Mela instituted in 1867 came to be known as the Hindu Mela from 1872 onward as a consequence of identification of the new-born political consciousness and enthusiasm for self-revelation.

Bangadarshan (1872), the esteemed periodical of Bankim Chandra, did a lot to pour in fresh potency and

virility into the unwholesome, sickly and dejected spirit of Hinduism with treatises on the Vedanta, the two Epics and the Puranas. Unlike Shashadhar Tarkachudamani, Bankim Chandra thought of building of the nation on the basis of religion which is realisation. In his Krishna Charitra (1886) he represented Krishna not as Divinity, but as human being; his Dharmatattva (1886) emphasised the cultural rationalism of Religion, while his novel exposition of the Geeta on the synthesis of Devotion (Bhakti), Action (Karma) and Knowledge (Jnan) found expression in his patriotic prose fictions 'Ananda Math', 'Devi Chowdhurani' and 'Sitaram'. Following the footprints of his great contemporary, Nabin Chandra Sen, in his trilogy 'Raivatak','Kurukshetra' and 'Prabhas' geared up the new spirit of Hindu Revival by portraying Krishna's humanitarianism, attaching less importance to Divinity incarnated or Avataratattva (The Doctrine of Incarnation) and in 'Amitabha' and 'Amritabha' Gautam Buddha and Sri Chaitanya respectively not as Incarnations of God but as ordinary man of integrity.

Hem Chandra, in his epic-type narrative 'Vritrasanhar', instilled the spirit of nationalism of Indian awakening into the saga of the Puranas, while Bhudeb gave vent to his concern in his essays on a national synthesis of Western Culture and the wholesome aspects of Christianity.

We should mention in this context Jogendra Chandra Bose and Amritalal Bose among other literary figures of the time, whose works bear trenchant critique of the Brahma Samajees and their movement. Rabindranath Tagore, the worldly acclaimed Poet-Prophet, aimed at fusing the superb qualities of culture of the East and the West, of course at a later phase.

Theosophy, uniting mysticism with plausible philosophical thinking and science based notions in a peculiarly wonderful manner which had been introduced and fostered in Europe by a few thinkers of the continent, was transformed into an invigorating creed in the hands of Madame H. P. Blavatsky and Colonel H. S. Olcott who gave its start in New York in 1875 and popularised it in India in Madras sometime in 1886, ushered in another religious movement in the name of Theosophical Society "to promote the study of esoteric religious philosophies of the East." The Society, under the able leadership of Mrs. Annie Besant, a theosophist and at the same time a champion of India's independence movement and Hinduism, an author and a translator of many a Hindu scripture, a reformer as well, gathered momentum and made converts in numberless countries of the West given to the Occult religious practices of India, its followers here were not insignificant in number, at least for a brief span of time.

The Theosophical Society

The Theosophic movement deserves credit for succeeding in reviving and reorienting ancient Hindu ideas and institutions amongst the enlightened Hindu youngmen and persons of eminence like Peary Chand Mitra and others, its publication of Hindu scriptures with their English rendering, in promoting education and liberation of women in India. Old beliefs like 'Devachan' and 'Pitrichan' hereafter, transmigration of the soul, spirits and their post-mortem providence etc. Its unfailing faith in old practices, institutions and ideas might have hindered its wider spread or recognition. Yet this movement, though absolutely alien in origin and strangely hybrid in composition, appeared to be a

reform movement of Hinduism, so far it helped a train of sombre educated Indians to reconcile their innate hankering after mysteries with the intellectual contentment of keeping up a pseudo-scientific air and naturally an escape from the impact of atheism and Christianity. The socio-cultural reforms organised by the Theosophical Society enkindled a significant political upheavel through inception of the Indian National Congress in the year 1885.

The Parsee Reforms Movement

To put a check to the alarming trend of quite a considerable number of young Bengalees and Parsees of Bombay allured to court Christianity and Western culture and thereby save the community from their evil influences, Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha or Religious Reform Association, which was formed in 1851 with a view to reinstating the state of society of the Parsees and restoring Zoroastrian religious ideals to their native innocence, may be credited for its serving as a great fillip to the growth of Indian Nationalism and lending support to various socio-religious reforms.

In addition to these, mention may be made of the Mohammedan reformer Syed Ahmed Khan who wanted to set a modern epoch in motion for the Mohammedans through eradication of the social evils in the light of modern education. But his venture was limited exclusively to modern exposition of Islam, as he defended social reforms to stir the Muslims to self-convinction, self-promotion, outlook of acceptance of education of the Westerners, and their aggressive, hostile attitude to Hinduism and the Hindus. This accounts for its failure to be beneficial to the nation as

a whole. Some other minor associations and religious reformers like Vedic Mission in Madras (1886), the Isamoshipanthis of South Behar, the Radha Soami Satsang of Agra, the Deva Samaj of Sivanarayan Agnihotri of Uttar Pradesh, Sivanarayana Paramahamsa of Banaras and so on, sought to bring in a new form of religion, keeping their efforts far away either from the belief in ancient Hinduism or Westernisation through social reforms, which made them popular temporarily, their influence on the country being quite negligible.

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement

The said socio-religious movements attending on the ebb-tide of Indian Culture seeking to make forms of Hindu conviction culled from each of these movements free from the divided opinion of Western fault-finding dogmatists and contendings persons, established at least some aspects of Hinduism which proved as invincible rampart against the ravishing breakers of foreign culture. The net result was turning round of the Indian intellectuals, who started viewing anew the Hindu manner of life, learning to admire and adore the judicious teachings of their wise ancestors, and asserting their self-consciousness as the Hindus. Religious differences were on the wane in the later part of the nineteenth, century in the wake of the national movement when the Indians proceeded to bear the fire of enthusiasm issuing from the growing political consciousness. Hinduism emerging with renewed vitality brought the attention of the world to its radiant light and magnetic charm by the synthetic spiritual movement initiated by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836—1886), the wonderful God-inspired Saint, the Apostle of this neo-Hinduism of Dakshineswar and universalised by his worthy disciple Swami

Vivekananda. The illustrious Guru Sri Ramakrishna transformed his life, pouring on his disciple the bliss of a new power and vision, inspiring him to serve the suffering humanity as his God. In the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and then in the West Vivekananda propagated the universal religious ideas and ideals of Hinduism, sang the glory and greatness of of the 'Vedanta' philosophy of universal love and amity, peace and co-operation, unity and integrity for the East and the West, and established Hinduism as the only synthetic religion that embraces all the methods of realisation and all the aspects of the Supreme Being, the scriptures and messages of various beliefs of the world. His Ramakrishna Mission installed in 1897 brought on the vanguard another movement facilitating revitalism of India with her indigenous religious ideals and cultural excellence coupled with a progressive attitude to science, trade and technology of the Western world as beneficial to material progress for India. He wanted to elevate our ignorant, downtrodden lower classes of people with the aid of socio-religious services. His honest, unwearying endeavour augmented through significant activities to stir up the consciousness of nationalism, manliness and manhood in the Hindus through social welfare services of the Ramakrishna Mission for the poor, neglected and oppressed masses of India, reached the highest point in the liberation Movement of India.

The spirit of reform, the immortal hymn of nationalism 'Bandemataram' as well as the patriotic works of Bankim Chandra, the arduous revolutionary fervour of the holy men Sri Aurobindo and others enkindled political consciousness of emancipation from the bondage of dependence and slavery which was at the

root of the revolutionary movement carried on by the daring, devoted terrorists having gained motion from Bengal Partition Movement, popularly esteemed as the Swadeshi Movement. The common people of India had by this time learnt to despise both Christianity and British rule as exotic and aggressive to their fundamental rights. Revolutionaries at every nook and corner were bent on freeing their motherland from the foreign yoke at any cost and sacrifice, drawing impetus from religion and gigantic spiritual personalities like Vivekananda and Pranavananda. The people to whom independence was the goal, the breath and blood of being, the day's thoughts and night's dream, could see the mother chained, with tears trickling down her cheeks and they renewed their fight. Thus we see thousands of martyrs like Kshudiram, Bhagat Singh Surja Sen, Bagha Jatin, Benay-Badal-Dinesh on the one hand and Mahatma Gandhi, Balgangadhar Tilak, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan, Netaji Subhas on the other. The last four personalities, though not terrorists, were definitely revolutionaries and institutors or national leaders trying heart and soul to expedite liberation either through Non-co-operation or Swaraj movement.

Expension of Political Consciousness: The National Freedom Movement

The Indian National Congress originated and in its formative years led by Sri Surendra Nath Banerjee and his esteemed colleague W. C. Bonerjee who was its first President, fostered India's resolve to free herself from the fetters of British rule in the process of evolution. Political independence of the nation preferred by our later national advocates and Hindu religious leaders took the shape of the Indian National Independence Movement. We are to evaluate the significance of

religions and religious sentiments that played a vital role, activity and passively, in the struggle to attain India's national freedom. But we must not lose sight of the fact that our political leaders did neither hesitate to accept political device of vulgar faction 'Non-Muslim' and 'General' at later phase for the vast majority of Hindu people, the three-fourths of our total population, nor did they raise a single finger of protestation against the sacrifice and unjust usurption of their socio-religious, cultural rights and privileges, to keep the Muslim sentiment in good temper and undermine solidarity of the Hindus and the Muslims ; and so fell upon the Hindu masses atrocities in the forms of indiscriminate slaughter, persecution, conversion into Islam, abduction and molestation of Hindu women, communal strifes consequently. It pains us to see even now in Independent India so many political figures and so-called or self-styled intellectuals to wage a drive against Hinduism and Hindus on the plea that these are responsible for the differences, discords, feuds and quarrels in India and that the root of jealousy and grudge is ingrained in religion which, if eradicated, can put a close to dissensions and discords ; a few of them stoop so low as to depreciate and disown Hindu culture as fanatic, to serve their vested interests. Those who wear the garb of affectation and live in fools' paradise, are likely to opine that religion's place is at the cosy corner of the room to keep the environment free from contamination, since different men of religion have enunciated contradictory messages at different periods making for the dissension.

Some thinkers, however, have established the truth in the light of comparative study of religions and religious principles that they give vent to their thoughts

in words invaluable from a level which is beyond any differences of space and time.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda moulded Catholic Hinduism to a new shape and sought to secure the fundamental eqaulity and dignity of men on the base of the Vedantic assimilation and Vedanta philosophy of oneness and unity in diversity, but it was Acharya Swami Pranavanandaji who, besides being a Divine Incarnation, appeared as a dynamically active Seer of the Age to give a good rebuff to the sceptical men of politics and intellect that all religions are the creative products of a single mind but Hinduism stands for good as an enormous synthesis of many an aspirant— as the positive Truth visualised and attained by the Divine Sages of the old through exercise of their life-long austerities and spiritual abstraction He thus dispelled the misgivings and misinterpretations of Dharma or Religion of these cynics and persons of selfish motive, vindicated Hinduism as a means of enlivening, invigorating panacea to the ailing humanity, fulfilled the national and humanitarian needs of the hour India's inner self had been eagerly longing for. At a crucial juncture when the contemporary forces made up of different sorts were at work in the milieu, Pranavanandaji, like the luminous Sun in the firmament of India's history, shed radiance all over the land and roused the entire Nation from the penury of self-oblivion as a Divine Nation-builder and a Saviour of Humanity. Well equipped as he was with the spirit of freedom of thought and reasoning, dedication and life-long devotion to truth, of an undaunted, uncompromising struggle against odds and hazards of all kinds for realisation of the aspiring object characteristic of the true sons of the sacred soil of Bengal, he initiated

the use of a vigorous all-immanent revolution of synthesis and synchronisation of the soul and progressive aspects of all the preceding religio-socio-cultural movements pursuant to a beautiful blend of the spiritual principles of Hinduism of the Vedas and the ideals of Gautama Buddha and Shankaracharya to fortify the citadel of India's political and cultural progress against non-Hindu and non-Indian aspersion and anathema.

ADVENT OF THE WORLD-TEACHER AND SAINT-SAVIOUR

> "Whenever virtue declines and vice prevails,
> I incarnate myself from age to age to secure
> the virtuous and to destroy the sinners".[4]
>
> —*Srimat Bhagawat Geeta.*

The sacred writings of all celebrated religions affirm solemnly that in the midst of prevailing disorder in our society when moral excellence or efficacy decays and immorality, impurity, oppression and depravity prevail, the Eternal or the Absolute appears on earth as a Divine incarnation from time to time to eradicate vices and thereby make the pious secure and reinstate justice, peace and order. Acharyas, Greatmen, Godmen, Prophets or saviours, World-Teachers or Saints, Messiahs or Apostles—we call them as we wish.

It was in 1896 A.D. that such a World-teacher and Saint-Saviour appeared in the person of a village laddie and became a Yogi, a contemplative Ascetic at the tender age of sixteen on undergoing spiritual excellence and strenuous austerities, and in the light of realisation of Divine Bliss, incarnated himself as the Seer of the

Age through his apothegms which are known as "Sangha Vani" or "Message of the Sangha".

The World-teacher or Universal Spiritual Master is an ideal Preceptor who is endowed with golden qualities of head and heart and who shows the erring humanity the right path they have to tread—following his teaching and preaching, precept and example which he himself employs in thoughts, words, deeds and spirit, in his day-to-day existence.

Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji, the Divine Seer of modern India, was a great preceptor and guide, the very embodiment of self-discipline and self-sacrifice. The greatest apostle of the Indo-Aryan culture and civilisation was at the same time the greatest champion of the most progressive ideas in socio-religious and humanitarian services. But he did not only reveal the spirit of the age, but also expounded such views as were far ahead of his time. He succeeded admirably in carrying his ideas of Nationalism and liberalism in religious practices and social activities to the very root of rural India and to the multitude tied down to age-long ignorance and superstition, penury and persecution. He is in this sense Shankaracharya or Gautama Buddha or Srikrishna reborn.

Swami Pranavananda can be called the Morning star of Indian Reawakening. He was a valiant combatant, undaunted by reverses and hindrances, held morality and piety to be the very backbone of India's glory and ideal of dedication, completely reluctant to make any compromise with the sinister forces of evil. He condemned the caste system, was prepared to concede a

dignified position in society to persons who happened to hail from low classes. But he believed firmly in personal chastity and purity.

A philanthropist full of the milk of human sympathy and forgiving in nature, Pranavanandaji was, however, a believer in resistance and consequently in the use of force, if and whenever needed. He was not at all averse to enhancement in integrated and collective strength. As like Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Sri Ramkrishna or Vivekananda, he also strove and succeeded in constituting and stabilising an organic synthesis of all the wholesome aspects of varied sects and religions, but he stepped forward in waging and continuing a veritable crusade simultaneously against the aggressive Islam and Christianity by training his religious brotherhood of monks and followers up to the style of his own living, directing them to become worthy successors of the ancient Sages of India, the potent advocates and compassionate friends of the untouchables, the staunch champions of the ideals of self-restraint, self-dedication, Devotion to Truth and Temperance.

The strong enthusiasm of Suddhi or Reconversion and Sangathan or Reorientation of the Arya Samaj against the profligate and avaricious, selfish and relentlessly tyrannical haters and oppressors of the Hindus, the spirit of religio cultural resurgence of Sanatan Hindu religion, the synthetic dictums and philosophical interpretations of Spiritual Renaissance of Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, and something else—all these, as we shall discern in our perusal of the glorious march of Swami Pranavanandaji through the path of life—add

to the gamut of his all-comprehensive, all-sided gigantic personality.

The whole-hogger Prophet lived, moved and acted in this earth earthy in human form, but his soul soared far above this terrestrial existence. In his paternal refuge he led a forlorn life of utter seclusion, totally lost in spiritual screnity even in the vortex of sick, hurry and bustle of household life. But despite his congenital absorption in profund meditation and mental abstraction, he never estranged himself from social and philanthropic activities for human welfare and moral uplift of the youngsters about him whom he extended unstinted aid and co-operation of all sorts in forming their character and mode of living.

PROSPECTIVE PRELUDE TO AN EXALTED FUTURE

After Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda the advent of such a national prophet of universal prodigious force of mobility was the need of the hour, and such a dynamic personality was born in Swami Pranavanandaji. The blowing of a mighty, soothing and refreshing wind of religiosity freed from corruptions and religious practices ensnared by the priests who as self-styled masters declared themselves to be the go-betweens between gods and men, demolishing the bolted doors and throwing open the iron shutters of individual and national life, was foreshadowed in his auspicious birth. Philospphers, men of erudition and socio-religious thinkers could probably visualise prospective prelude to a glorious future and foresee dawning of a cultural, spiritual and national resurgence, a revival for gala assemblage of unity and integrity of truly pious and spirited

souls working for common and sustained manner of living for humanity's sake, for the world's good, so to say. Despite the erroneous idea of the outside world that India has not yet got far beyond the mode of savagery and has yet to learn how to come out of the darkness of primitive barbarism in the sphere of enlightenment, it is undeniably true that quite a large number of intellectuals and explorers of truth and peace of modern Europe and nearby all the big nations of the world are so keen on acquainting themselves with the Divine Life and mission of this God-man, of his messages of unity and untiring service to and sacrifice for humanity. This cohesive, unifying force emerged from the magnetic personality of Swami Pranavananda standing for the very significant unison and harmony of our collective existence and convictions. His life, we will notice, is his message and it is perhaps nobler than his sayings in as much as it symbolises the genuine spirit of the Vedas and the Geeta, and of the holy religious scriptures of the Hindus and the non-Hindus, he himself being the everliving embodiment of purity and chastity, celibacy and austerity, dedication and perfection—the all-immanent omnipuissant, omnibenign Lord Shiva, the God of gods, in human shape.

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III

A GLIMPSE OF LIFE IN THE MAKING

● NATIVITY, NATIVE LAND AND PARENTAGE

It was a full moon day in the month of Magha on 16th, 1302 B. S. (29th January, 1896 A.D.). The entire universe got flooded with mild glow of the moon. On the same day another moon illuminated the lap of Saradadevi by the advent of a healthy bony baby who afterwards became an idol of religious resurrection. Nobody knew that this male child would dominate the whole nation by his religious and philosophical concept.

It is a village at the remote corner of Faridpur District and Madaripur Sub-division in East Bengal, now in Bangladesh. The name of the village is Bajitpur. It stands at a distance of nearly a mile from the river Kumar wherefrom a small canal enters the village in different directions serving the means of communication, particularly during the rainy season.

Bajitpur was inhabited by mostly upperclass Hindus, viz., Brahmins and Kayasthas. Bishnu Charan Bhuinya of this village was a distinguished person. With his gigantic, stout and stately stature, he was a man of stern disposition and dynamic character. He was a pious person, almost austere in life, and so out and out orthodox and uncompromising was he in his views that the slightest departure from these, was, he thought, unwarranted and deserving of a denunciation. Everybody of the village loved and respected him. He was not wanting in natural affection, or lacked compassion

with his fellow-beings at large, he had an enormous share of both. In the stern and forbidding exterior Bishnu Charan possessed soft mind, sea wide heart. He had his employment as an official in the estate of the local influential Zaminder Rajkumar Majumdar, a Brahmin by caste, the elder brother of Maharaj Surya Kanta of Mymensingh and both of them—the employer and the employee—were cordial to each other. However, owing to misunderstanding of facts related to ownership of landed property he lost his job and he had to fight a civil suit for about twenty years. But nothing could bend him down and drag him out of his bold conviction In the days of adversity his only attraction was his family Deity Nila Rudra Shiva, God of the gods, and rightly enough he got the untold blessings of the Deity as he firmly believed that only Divine Power could solve the impasse.

His wife Saradadevi was a worthy conjugal partner and echoed love, simplicity, sympathy and affection she imbibed from her husband. She was an idol of purity. One day she saw in dream that Kailaspati Lord Shiva was lying asleep in her lap. She through her entire life worshipped the Deity with whole-hearted devotion. Bishnu Charan was not at all surprised when his wife posted him with all that she had seen in her dream. Particularly she stated that the God of gods assured her—"I am coming to your lap as your son to fulfil your desire".

On the propitious day of Maghi Purnima in 1896 A.D. when the child was born, it came with a peculiar phenomenon as the prolonged litigation between the Zaminder and Bishnu Bhuinya was decided in his favour, i.e. against the Zaminder who paled into

insignificance and Bishnu Charan coming out of the trials and tribulations with flying colours thriving in ever growing dignity and material affluence. The beautiful child was named as 'Joynath' signifying harbinger of triumph. But as he was born on Wednesday, the people was to call him 'Budha' and finally, on the occasion of his first taking rice upto the period of initiation, he was known as 'Binode'.

THE CELESTIAL BOY AND HIS DIVINE VISION :

The child Binode started growing as the cynesure of all eyes. But he possessed peculiar qualities, as he was somehow different from other children of his age. He was very calm and composed and his mother had nothing to bother with and about him. This healthy handsome boy would engage the attention of any person who came in contact with him, but he was decisive of his selection. Still it appeared that he would hate mean and despicable, hateful persons and avoid the lap of the maid-servant of certain supposed early lapses. His mother knew this aspect and kept a close watch on him so that he might not be trapped in her lap. His elder sister Hemangini whose affection for Binode was genuinely endless, always looked after him remaining by his side not merely in his childhood or boyhood days, but also when this laddie, this affectionate younger brother of hers, became celebrated as Preceptor Swami Pranavanandaji and constitutor of the Divine Mission Bharat Sevashram Sangha.

Binode was really a boy of rare species. Such a little boy had never indulged in any mischief or malpractice. He had very little urge for food or play. The neighbours conversed that this well-formed, lovely boy of the Bhuinya family might get dumbed in view of his

very economic speaking. On certain occasion this boy used to take his seat under a tree and dived into meditation. It was no concern for Bishnu Charan as he knew that this son of his had been born by the grace of Lord Shiva.

This singularity got publicity amongst the local people and not only that, it spread beyond the areas of the neighbouring villages and the people therefrom thronged his house in batches.

That Binode was a boy of uncommon group was evident from his behaviour and attitude. In the courtyard of his house there was a small pedestal on which a Tulsi plant (the holy basil, a small shrub held sacred by the Hindus) was implanted. Binode noticed that everyday, after bathing, his mother was sprinkling water on it and repeating the same thing in the evening even lighting a lamp underneath the plant at dusk. He could not understand why and how this was done by his female parent. One evening as he was standing near the holy basil, most casually he threw spit in and a slight portion fell on the plant. Then happened a peculiar phenomenon, Binode all on a sudden fell unconscious. The information was conveyed to Saradadevi who hurried to the spot and caressed him in the primitive form by sprinkling water on his face. Binode gradually got his consciousness back and his mother asked him, "What is the reason of your getting unconscious ?" Binode replied, "I carelessly spat and some portion of it fell on the plant. I immediately saw an idol of resplendence, a godly figure coming out of the plant, staring at me for some time, and then merging in me. Mother, I never saw such a beautiful person, then I fell asleep". Saradadevi realised that the Deity

who is residing there blessed his son and became one with him. Afterwards when Binode was recognised as an Acharya or Preceptor, he would narrate the episode to his disciples and apprise them of his conviction that Tulsi is definitely the abode of the Supreme Being. On another occasion much later when one day the Acharya was seated on a shrine at the Hermitage of Madaripur with Swami Vedanandaji standing beside him, the latter's marginal end of cloth befell a Tulsi shrub seeing which the Acharya warned him mildly to manage to leave the spot and stand after and added that this Divine plant could be living, talking to him on five minutes' meditative concentration.

The Goddess Durga was worshipped in quite a befitting manner at the dwelling building of Harabilash Das yearly. At the sight of such pomp and splendour Binode was in doubt that there being nothing celestial or extra-mundane in this idol made of mud, why it was being adored so magnificiently and on the expiry of three days immersed in the water in the like manner, whether Durgadevi, the Divine Mother, was living within the earthen image and would receive man's offerings. Binode, when he was a young Yogi, wanted to put his queries into acid test by personally experiencing the truth and getting confirmed of the existence of the Deity in the idol. He, accordingly, rushed to the house of his neighbour Harabilash one day at dead hours of night leaving all asleep. He instantly turned up before the representation of Durgadevi in wood, bamboo, etc. and decided boldly, she would not draw his reverence and adoration unless and until she makes her appearance as the breathing goddess. He intently gazed and gazed upon the effigy, delved deep into a self-absorbed spiritual meditation during which he lost his

entity, became one with the Supreme Mother, so that he visualised in his rapturous mood before him the loving female parent, the goddess and the protectress Durga with smile on her lips, consoling and blessing him, her unearthly radiance entering in and becoming one with him. Binode came back to his sense after sometime and proceeded to his hut of austere ascetic practice completely confirmed, assured and contented.

• RESOLVED TO ACT AS A SAVIOUR-LOVER OF LIVING BEINGS:

From the very infancy Binode possessed a soft heart. He used to love everybody and it was not restricted a bit within human beings only but stretched to animals and insects also. Once his elder brother took him for fishing purpose and got possession of a big shoal fish (a large tubular fish). He handed over the fish to Binode and asked him to cajole the fish cleat dive. Any other boy of his age would have translated the desire of his elder brother to reality, but it pained Binode so much that he could not obey the order of his brother. Suddenly the fish jumped into the water and the pangs of Binode subsided. He did not learn this by reading books but it was his congenital quality.

Another day he noticed that a small iguana was lying like dead near his house in the corner of a bush of shrubs. He picked it up and by regulated treatment brought it back to life.

Saradadevi, disturbed and annoyed by the pestering of a mangoose, asked Binode if he could catch it, since it was spoiling every food. Running after a mangoose to catch it is not merely troublesome and hard but impossible also. But the word 'impossible' was all

Greek to the boy. So he followed it rushing in hectic speed after it He was inflicted with injuries of scratches in so many limbs of his body and bled in thorny bushes. But so unflinching was his determination that he got hold of the creature at last, placed it before his mother, and then set it free.

Long afterwards Swamiji narrated a story to his disciples saying that once his father told him to pull out a boat lying in the nearby pond by means of the persons employed in his house as he intended to proceed to Madaripur sub-division at the dawn of the next day. Swamiji forgot the matter altogether and when it occurred to him, the night advanced to some extent. He thought to drag the boat out of the water next morning might not be wise and as such he dived into the pond and by his iron will-force dragged the big boat out of water which could be done only by collective efforts of at least seven to eight persons.

These small incidents were indications of his golden heart and firm resolution and induced him to engage himself in fighting the battles of life and in the service of mankind. This instinct, in other words, broadened his heart and he devoted himself to services of the nation and of mankind as a whole. In his childhood and in manhood after he revealed himself as the great Spiritual Master, he would set about his task with firm resolution, and would not rest till it was accomplished, or till it was proved that, for some reason or other, it was in spite of the best he could do, not conducive to human welfare, even to his weak adversary, when he set his heart upon doing a thing, or when the sad song of the teeming afflicted millions called upon him to undertake anything. "A boy, who can after cool

deliberation and iron determination, can court a life of renouncing, can never lack in prowess", so he would write to the devoted young ascetics ; he used to say, conviction alone gave him the power and willforce gave him the impetus. During the period of his austere religious practices and in carrying on with his all out movements for nation-building, he remained stubborn and undaunted in the teeth of all odds and hazards to reach the goal without swerving an inch from the direction of his resolves. How convincingly he has left his proclamation for the posterity in trumpet-like voice that "laurel of success is sure to adorn the man who is firm and adamant in his resolution. Let the life be off the body before giving up resolution".[1]

● AN EMBODIMENT OF ABSOLUTE SELF-RESTRAINT SELF-COMPOSEDNESS OF MIND.

Binode was admitted to the village school for education. Like other boys he also attended school but did not feel happy. It appeared that he was brooding something always. He felt that he was not that boy who, on completion of the education, would enter the family, marry and carry on his quotidian living, he had separate things to do. He would be somewhat different from the multitude. He would have to build the nation and that preparation is a different thing. The contemplative nature grew so intense and profound as the boy was becoming older that he very often could not properly succeed in attending to his perusal of lessons in school. Some times he kept mum for five or six hours at a stretch and at that time it appeared he had no sense and his soul was traversing somewhere else. After completing his education in the junior stage he got admitted in the Rajkumar Edward Memorial High

English School set up during the British regime. Here also he maintained the same state and at most times he was self-enveloped in divinely thoughts. It so happened some times that even after the day's close of studies all the teachers and his classmates had left for home ; he was still sitting in the class. The teachers viewed this unmindful student with great affection and love. The peculiarities of the boy convinced them that he was a boy of distinction. Every year Binode would bag and bring good conduct prizes at home.

Self-control raises us above trivialities and controls or restrains our instinctive impulses. It is the key to all manly qualities. To what extent Binode practised this self-restraint is evident from what he would take daily as food. His father Bishnu Charan was a man of sufficient means and members of his family were very much fond of fish, meat and other costly delicious diets. But Binode used to take only a handful of salted cooked rice, a few boiled potatoes, and nothing else. One day he was forced to take fish as the fish was caught from the pond of the Bhuinyas. After taking the fish much against his will, Binode began to vomit. His mother tried to give him milk, butter, etc. to compensate his very simple diet. This she did on the instructions of Mahendra Chakraborty, the son of the priest of Bhuinya family who advised him to take milk product that would be bland and sacred for a Brahmachari (one practi ing abstinence from sensual or other worldly pleasures and preparing to join an order of hermits) like him. Binode answered firmly, "If you administer high flames underneath the pot which boils the milk, the milk will obviously come out of the pan and fall on the ground. I am retaining my strength bestowed by the Almighty, which is sufficient enough

and if I take high proteaned diet, it will ooze out and make me morally weak. To preserve this God-gifted power I take bland diet, enjoy sleep a bit, do difficult exercise and practise austerities. In my present strength if you like to see, I can demolish the pillar by a single kick only."

Mahendra was awestruck and kept mum. He realised what amount of self-restraint and purity the boy possessed. Binode abandoned all luxury of bed but still his elder sister Hemangini arranged his bed with mat, curtain, pillow, etc. so that he might enjoy his peaceful sleep. But in the next morning she would find him sitting on the cot without any cover or pillow on it. He would sleep an hour only. Later on, he completely shunned sleep for long years at a stretch. He would absorb himself in meditation at that period, during daytime confined in his room and the whole night on the altar of penance in the deserted crematory. And afterwards when he was acclaimed as a preceptor, he told his disciples that from his very infancy, at the age of five, he would dive in meditation sitting on the bare wooded platform completely naked. At an age when boys cannot remain without any action, Binode used to remain in meditation and spiritual trance for hours together and everybody thought he was blessed with some super-power as it was only possible for a boy to take to sustain if he was gifted with divine blessings. Since boyhood Binode had been in quest of spiritual truth which could not be revealed without purification of mind. He delved deep into meditation as he could not purify and sublimate his heat without spiritual abstraction. He was really absolute self-restraint embodied even in his early boyhood days. A born leader and God-ordained spiritual preceptor even

in this early student life, he appeared to be a magnetic personality to the boys of the school who came in close touch with him, looked upon him as their guide, were always at his beck and call, and would follow his counsels in debatable matters. In the short recess for tiffin and refreshment, they surrounded him swarming like bees round the hive, casting a longing lingering look on what would come out of his lips.

THE INVINCIBLE, IMPREGNABLE ACHILLES

It is the general idea of persons that to obtain a good and sound physique, costly articles like milk, butter, curd, fish, meat. fruits must have to be taken. But Binode, as we have seen. was completely opposed to it and it appeared that by taking only rice, salt and boiled potato he became uncommonly stout and strong. He would practise different exercises every day.

The people used to wonder how he could play with such big-sized cudgels. His physical power was noticed by the villagers and this has been stated by one of his friends Satish Babu. By the side of Satish Babu's house ran a canal. One day seven or eight persons were trying to lift up a two-hundred-one capacity boat out of water on the bank for painting tar in it, but their combined effort could not do the task. Binode laughingly said, "Do you all take rice or devour ashes ? Give aside", saying this he alone dragged out the boat himself. Another day a big tree was hewed down so that planks might be sawed but before that the tree had to be raised to rest on a certain height. Brahmachari Binode saw fifteen to sixteen able-bodied persons trying in vain to raise the trunk of the tree. He asked them to move aside and raised the tree to the required height single-handed and then said laughingly, "No

amount or quantity of fish, meat, egg, butter or milk can give you the needed strength unless and until you have achieved that by self-control and self-discipline".

A veritable Mohammedan hooligan was an object of awe and dread to the Hindu people of Bajitpur. He was also dreaded by the Mohammedans. Almost all had to yield to his physical powers and pocket his insult and assault without protestation. Once it so happened that this riff-raff warned the Hindus that he would not spare anybody, he would teach them a good lesson. None of the Hindus came forward with raised finger before him as they got panicky of him and because of the discord breaking out of late between the two communities in the market. Binode, on hearing the harrassment of the poor, helpless victims, decided that this time the ruffian ought to be given a violent retort and punishment, if necessary, because he had gone too far. He went out, was on his way to the market and seeing the wicked fellow not afar he was warned by him with the false, conconcted allegation of agitating the Hindus. The Muslim ruffian declared himself as the gang-leader. He laughed at the young Brahmachari with scorn and contemptuously hurled impugn at him with the words that he did not care a fig for him and that he would tease and physically assault the Hindus. Binode said nothing in reply, he instantly caught hold of the villain's legs and threw him away with violent wrath and might. The miscreant struck dumb with awe and prostrating at the feet of Binode begged to be excused. We can surmise how overwhelmed with wonder and admiration the commons of the surrounding countryside were when they came to know of the extraordinary powers of Binode.

THE PRODIGIOUS STUDENT : INITIATION ASCETIC MENDICANCY AND ATTAINMENT :

In 1913 Binode was a student of class X. Sri Birendralal Bhattacharya joined Bajitpur High School as Head Master this year. Very soon Binode engaged his attention ; Sri Bhattacharya became interested in him and enquired about him with admiration. The teachers said cheerfully that Binode was a boy of rare species, so solemn, calm and quiet, and self-composed, ever ready to come to the succour of the sick, needy and afflicted. Gradually the Head Master got close acquaintance with the boy. Afterwards when Birendra Babu, the cream of the University of Calcutta, joined Pheni College as Principal, observed as follows :

"I came in touch with Swami Pranavananda when he was a student of Class X. His name was Binode Behari Das, father's name was Bishnu Charan Das Bhuinya. The title indicates that Bishnu Charan was a man of affluence. Bajitpur was Brahmin-dominated area and in the nearby neighbourhood of the village lived a few Kayastha families ; Bishnu Charan's was one of them. He had built big house, made landed properties, possessed golden ornaments. He possessed a well-built figure. Binode being junior in age to a very few of his brothers and sisters was not involved in any domestic matters But this boy, it appeared to me, was an exiled god and as such he had no fancy for or attention to worldly matters. Often it was found that he had fixed his eyes between his two brows and dived in meditation. As Head Master I found him seated in his class in bended heads, calm and composed, and when I called out his name, he would respond as if lifted out of here. Distance between Binode and

myself was considerable, because I was the Head Master and he was a student. But he possessed such an appearance that one had to be inquisitive about him."

"The other teachers used to speak highly of him. But the only drawback with him was that he had no love for reading. He was bare-footed without any shirt, and he was often clad in ordinary cloth and a sheet of cloth in his upper body. He had pearl-like teeth, expanded breast, curled hairs, with sweet, mild smile on his lips. He often resembled as if an idol of Lord hiva covered with snow. Every day he would exercise with cudgels sleep on hard plank of wood, practise spiritual abstraction like a sage. He would do all this not for his personal emancipation but for society, masses and the nation as a whole to whose sufferings he could not remain blind."

"Then came Shivaratri, i.e. the fourteenth lunar day of the month of Phalgoon when God Shiva is worshipped Binode toiled very hard from morning to night, participated in Kirtan (celebration of singing in praise of god), and with deep agony told me, 'Sir, I fail to reconcile myself, I will leave household etc. and take to mendicancy, I have to resurrect the youths of Bengal, I cannot see and stand their degeneration'. I told him, 'Wait for sometime, sit for the examination, and after that decide your course of action'. But who would hear his advice whose mind is dragged by divine influence? At last I told him, 'If you have made up your mind to renounce this worldly, domestic life and resort to a life of self-abnegation, I shall take you to the illustrious Yogi (Saint) Gambhirnath Babaji at Gorakhpur. He will guide you to the right path."

Head Master Birendralal Bhattacharya, be it stated here, had been initiated by Gambhirnathji at the esteemed abbey of Gorakhpur.

Binode raised a mild resistance, "Sir, can a man become Guru (preceptor) of a man ?" Why he protested thus was not known. Perhaps the attitude and design of the professional preceptors pained his heart. Birendra Babu explained to him about the achievement of Gambhiranathji and then Binode said, "Well, Sir ! I shall go to Gorakhpur".

During Puja vacation of the year 1913 Birendra Babu took Binode to Baba Gambhiranath and got himself acquainted with him. It was decided that Binode would be initiated in mantra and tantra (mystic, esoteric words recited in prayer to God and system or cult of religious worship/incantations and charms) on Ekadashi (the Fast observed by Hindus on the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight)after the Vijaya Dashami day, i.e., the day on which the image of Goddess Durga is immersed. Nathji also asked some of the people to come for initiation on that occasion.

On the date and time stipulated above, everybody came but Binode was absent. Everybody ran here and there but he was not found. At last Nathji said, "Look anon, there stands a big tree nearby. Binode is standing underneath". Binode was then thinking that if Gambhirnathji be his Guru, he would definitely find him out and initiate him. Binode's conviction was true. Gambhirnathji initiated the self-fulfilled congenital saint in a different way and named him Brahmachari (one practising abstinence from sensual or other worldly pleasures and preparing to join an order of

hermits for attainment of knowledge of God) Binode. The great preceptor Basistha, while initiating Sri Rama Chandra uttered, "O the Magi, you have nothing else to know or learn, you have learnt everything by means of your subtle, uncommon intellect and spiritual power, What you need now is a bit modification or chiselling of transparent intellect-mirror of your innate purity and chastity"[1]. Receptacle of a God-man remains predestined, prepared before his advent. The Yogi of Yogis Gambhirnathji, too, initiated Binode, a born realiser of the Absolute, with a view to brushing him up. Initiation of Brahmachari Binode is indeed an epoch-making event in the history of India's spiritual austere, arduous vow or difficult goal. The Brahmachari asked Nathji for sannyasa. But his prayer was not granted at that time, as Nathji could foresee the divine-willed glorious revelations of the young Brahmachari's life in the role of 'Avatar' of India, nay, of the world to emerge anew from an abysmal darkness of Adharma. The Brahmachari was asked to wait for the destined moment to come.

After initiation the Brahmachari came back to Bajitpur and incidentally told his elder sister Hemangini Basu that during that time there was no yogi who could excel Grmbhirnathji. After a few months, on invitation, he again came to Gorakhpur Monastery and found that the place was very much suitable for worship and meditation. He selected a solitary mango-garden adjacent to the monastery, carried on meditation without food or sleep throughout day and night, and it so happened that Nathji himself would find him out and feed him by food. Kalinath, one of the monks of the Abbey, complained to Nathji, "Binode does not do any work of the Monastery. He passes all his hours

without any duty. In a sombre voice Nathji retorted, "Don't molest him. Let him do what he likes. The way he is doing my Service none of you can come near it at any rate." Sometimes after, taking leave from Nathji, Binode hastened to Banaras where he lived in a lonely house at the 'Asi-Ghat' and spent his days and nights in almost senseless state, merged in the Absolute. He had no urge for food. Who used to supply him food he never cared for. Afterwards when Brahmachariji was made Swami Pranavananda Maharaj, he told his disciples that that time Gambhiranathji would come to him in divinely body. He said to them, "Where would you get a superman like Nathji ? He could guide the sun and the moon but who could recognise him ?"

While in Benaras he was down with high fever. The heat was so high that the earth got black with it. It was owing to few days' severe spiritual abstraction and for practising posture of sitting in yogic meditation, one of the different modes of interwining the fingers during meditation or worship known as Mudra and breath-control as prescribed in the yoga system (Pranayam). In that state of health and mind Nathji took him to different holy shrines and whispered in his ears such hymns or words of prayer as would pull him up. When he was in Banaras and was suffering from high fever, an old matron would nurse and look after him. He said afterwards that had he not been locked after by that old august lady, it would not have been possible for him to come back to life. Soon after, Brahmachari Binode, under the direction of his Guru Nathji, returned to his native place Bajitpur.

Here, at Bajitpur, he employed Himself in profound meditation. At this time he used to have communication

with stalwart devotees and ascetics and this time the sense came incognito. Brahmachariji very often mentioned the name of Lord Jagatbandhu. Jagatbandhu was an earnest devotee practising austere religious vow or penance. A boy then came in contact with Brahmachari Binode and became his most favourite. This boy, one of his followers, afterwards named as Swami Satchidanandaji, was his intimate associate. One day Binoda told him to come in the evening as there would be Kirtana recital (act of singing the names of God) and Lord Jagatbandhu would be present. The boy was little late and when he came, he found the door had been closed from within, but to his utter amazement heard the song of extolment of the cycle of Radha and Krishna, the Divine Lady and God, inside. After sometime someone opened the door and the boy asked him whether Lord Jagatbandhu had come. The response was, "Yes, he came". This was, however, divinely meeting as none of the two—the Brahmachari and Jagatbandhu—had met each other in human frame.

In the terrace of Bhuinya house there was a small room almost detached from the entire house, and was very suitable for yoga or abstract meditation purposes. Brahmachariji took possession of the room and dived into meditation almost isolated from the outside world. For long seven days he stopped meeting, talking and taking food. Everybody waited and after seven days the Brahmachari opened the door. It was found he was running high temperature. Physician of the Government hospital came and took the temperature which was 107° degree. The bewildered physician said, "Such type of fever may attack the elephants ; but men cannot survive against the attack". Curiously enough, Brahmachari Binode leaned over a pillow and

started talking with everybody present with heavenly gloss in his face. The doctor said, "Medicine is to be administered immediately lest disaster may happen. Send a man to the Hospital to fetch medicine". The elder sister Hemangini got ready to start for the Hospital. But Brahmachariji prevented her saying that it was no ordinary fever but it was owing to meditation and as such its treatment was different. The next morning he was found all right and normal.

Then he engaged himself in meditation for long fourteen days. Before he closed the door he told his mother that he would only take a little juice of 'Bilwa-Patra' (leafs of the marmelos or wood-apple) and besides that nothing should be kept outside the door. But mother Saradadevi out of her filial affection would keep with Bilwu-Patra juice some fruits and a green cocoanut outside the door. Brahmachariji said, "It is better to die than to break my vow". It was seen that he took only the Bilwa-Patra juice and nothing else and was keeping quite fit after fourteen days' penance.

One day, when after the end of the fourteen days' penance he was loitering in the garden, his cousin Kalidas saw him first. He afterwards wrote : "What a divinely frame ! He moved about the garden like a flash of lighting ! Fourteen days' penance could not rob him of his humanly frame but, as it were, it added to his beauty".

After his initiation in 1913 and till 1916 he used to pass the nights in his small room "Sadhana Kutira" on the terrace and at times he would meditate in the cremation ground. While going up and down the road beside this deserted place, people got frightened of the Brahmachari absorbed in meditation, who therefore

posted his younger brother Bhola with a trident in hand.

In the opposite side of the canal there was a thick-grown woodland of wild trees. The land being little low, it was under water for most of the time in the year and as such people used to avoid that place. But there stood a temple of Bana Durga, the Divine Mother, popularly known as Buro Thakurani. Once a year the local people would hold a 'mela' (fair) with great pomp near the sacred altar under a tree in the depth of that thicket of wild plants.

Brahmachari Binode selected this place as his future meditation spot.

In 1916 A.D., on the blessed day of Maghi Purnima (the day of the full moon in the month of Magh), Binode, merged in a state of suspended consciousness under a Kadamba (Nauclea flower) tree, had been transported to a celestial region. That night the great illumination dawned on him with manifestation of the Divine Mission stretching far and wide before his cosmic vision. The seed of divine force sowed in the fertile plane by the Yogi of Yogis Baba Gambhirnathji, now blossomed in full maturity. Brahmachari Binode got the creed of salvation as the chosen instrument of God's Will. And in that ecstatic state of mind he uttered: "This is the age of mass awakening, an age of mutual unity, an age of great assimilation, and an age of great salvation".

It may be said when he attained 'Siddhi' till then he was not invested with Sannyasa(Ascetic Mendicancy). In January, 1924 during Ardh Kumbha Fair (Partial Duodecennial religious gathering) in Proyag

(Allahabad), Swami Gobindananda Giri initiated him in Sannyasa on an auspicious moment and named him Acharya Swami Pranavananda, Thus, what Nathji did foresee came true.

● A BEACONLIGHT TO THE YOUNGSTERS :

That Binode, despite being a Brahmachari in the truest sense of the term, embodying absolute self-discipline, serenity, an amazing equipoise of mind, soaring high above the humdrum and gross materialism of this mundane existence held and developed an uncommon outlook on all worldly things, has already been hinted at. He had all those virtues as are found in a true friend, counsellor and guide to his associates and the youngsters surrounding him to whom he spoke about moral and spiritual life. This we can explain as 'precocity'. As he was a born leader, he resolved to renounce the world in order to dedicate himself for the nation's welfare, for its socio-spiritual-moral liberation which, he confidently believed, would enable the dependent, humiliated nation rise fearlessly and fight for national independence. In Tagore's superb poetic diction he" dived down into the depth of the Ocean of forms, hoping to gain the perfect pearl of the formless."[3] And he revealed his determination to build the nation resting on morality, religiosity and social welfare works of many and diverse kinds to Sri Birendra Lal Bhattacharya.

Not only the students of his school but students of different academic institutions and youths of the neighbourhood and countryside also were all obviously drawn to and made Binode their genuine friend and well-wisher and apprised him of their problems—their

inmost secrets. They would submit to his sagacity and decision in any controversial issue. The Brahmachari advised them how to build up character on the basis of self-sacrifice, self-restraint, truth and temperance. He insisted on controlling physical and mental impulses, passions and the senses and on preserving intact the vital energy and elixir of life, i.e., the Semen. He carefully impressed in the hearts of the youths the eternal words of Lord Shiva that penance of any sort is quite befitting Brahmacharya or continence, since in it lies the essential spirit of penances and religious practices.

Brahmachari Binode thought of their welfare much better than they did. He directed them to go forward along their resolved and specified path patiently and steadily with rigid moderation in diet and sleep, reminding them of the well-known adage—"Sound mind in a sound body; ill-health breeds ill propensities".

Thus Brahmachariji appeared to the youngsters to be a beaconlight exhilarating them to strive for liberation from the bondage of slavery and a nobler, better life and thereby inspiring them to work wholeheartedly for all-round well-being in a congenial environment of chastity and morality.

● ASSOCIATION WITH THE REVOLUTIONARIES :

From 1905 Bengal's revolutionary movement began to gain ground having obtained smuggled German weapons as a sequel to the last World War. The revolutionaries decided to wage a countrywide revolution and as such chalked out a plan for the

purpose. But this was a big job and called for fat sum. To collect this money they resorted to decoity at different places and even looted trains. Brahmachari Binode had no direct involvement with these anarchists, he did not believe that this sort of anarchist move would be able to produce the intended result and bring political liberation. But he was not indifferent to their aspiration, rather he supported freedom movement in the country and had indirect sympathy for the revolutionaries. One of the stalwarts of the freedom movement Purna Das had intimate acquaintance and maintained connection with Brahmachariji.

The revolutionary leader Santosh Dutta who belonged to nearby village of Bajitpur named Dutta Kendua had close connection with the Brahmachari who loved these freedom-fighters and prayed for their good. Not being in any way connected with the revolutionary movement, Brahmachari Binode harboured the revolutionists by keeping their fire-arms secretly with him. Intelligence Department of the British Police kept a vigilant watch on him. The police used to receive information from the village chowkidar (watchman) as the man resided near the house of the Bhuinyas. One night the police surrounded the house of the Brahmachari when he had with him two pistols, three swords and a bomb. He could not manage to send these things outside the house and after looking at the room he deposited these weapons and explosive concealed in the cornice of the room. But the risk was with regard to the bomb. Search started from the early morning. Binode's younger brother Bhola with a loin-cloth in his body was loitering in the courtyard with a small basket in which the bomb rested. He was merely a boy, and so in an unguarded moment he could

slip out of the courtyard easily and dropped the explosive in the nearby pond. Nothing objectionable was found. Still the police took the Brahmachari away to Madaripur. After three days his elder brother got him freed from the police custody.

In the year 1914 few decoities were occasioned near a few villages of Madaripur and the police felt that these actions were caused by the students of Madaripur and Bajitpur schools under the leadership of Purna Das. Having failed to identify the suspects the police at last filed a suit named 'Faridpur Conspiracy Litigation 1914', and started arresting at random the students and young boys, as they thought they were guided by the revolutionary organisation of Brahmachari Binode, and even they considered that big boys had close communication with Purna Das and Brahmachariji. It would not be wise, the police thought, to keep Brahmachariji outside the bar, they arrested him and kept him confined in Faridpur Jail. In his prison life the Brahmachari passed his time in spiritual abstraction. Mathura Nath Das, a lawyer and a friend of Bishnu Charan Bhuinya, contacted the Sub-divisional Officer of Madaripur, Mr. Donavan and convinced him saying thus, "Binode is a person of religious disposition—a young Brahmachari and has no connection with the revolutionaries. He works for the suffering humanity. This I know from his very childhood. After making careful searches the police released him and set him free at the close of more than three months from Faridpur Jail.

Brahmachari Binode differed no doubt from the ideas and ideals of the Revolutionaries, but they had great respect and admiration for him. It is learnt from

Nishi Kanta Dutta, one of his associates, that under cover of nocturnal darkness the anarchists would come to the Brahmachari.

Perhaps in the year 1922 Brahmachari Maharaj, at the request of Professor Prafulla Chandra Roy, launched a movement to popularise Charka (Spinning wheel) and handlooms amongst the villagers. One night, at the end of day's hard labour and after taking supper, Nishi Kanta took his bed. It was about 1.30 A.M. A voice from outside came, "Are you inside, Sir" ? Brahmachari Binode who was also in the room requested Nishi Kanta to open the door. Sri Dutta acted accordingly. When he tried to take the lamp to identify them, Brahmachariji prevented him from doing so and one of the entrants whispered something in his ears. Nishi Kanta was posted with the fact that they had no meals for more than one day. At the behest of the Brhamachari food was prepared which started at 2 P.M. and completed within an hour. When everything was ready, Sri Dutta while securing plantain leaf found that the Brahmachari was taking intimate with these persons. They were brought inside the room and food was served to them. Binode himself supervised their feasts with motherly care and said with a smile on his lips, "Only rice and soup of pigeon-pea. Are you satisfied ?" They answered that they had never taken food with such satisfaction even in an invitation.

During this period those who would come to Brahmachariji were mostly revolutionaries who considered him as their friend, philosopher and guide. Acharyadev spoke highly of them later on and used to post his disciples to follow the paths of selfless

dedication as were practised by those daring youths whom the British Government could not cow down despite severe torture. The government then adopted another policy and supplied luxury goods to them and said that if they agreed to marry, they would be set free. It was the idea of the Government that if once they could be thrust in married life, the ghost of revolution would evaporate from their brain.

During rainy season of 1940, the Acharya came to Madaripur for the last time. Some revolutionaries contacted him and he advised them to form Homeguard Force or Rural Militia. He also said that in the neglected Namashudra community a great strength lay dormant and if that could be utilised, it would be an asset to the said Militia. One night some of them—two revolutionary activists—went to see Brahmachariji at his residence, and he treated them with sweets and cakes and even gave them some cash money.

Who came to build the nation it is only possible for him to employ himself in the selfless sacrifice, and as such he always received the revolutionaries with cordiality and affection, helped whenever necessary, and advised them indicating the true and benevolent path of freedom movement.

Reference

1 Jogabasistha Ramayana, Canto 1.

2 Rabindranath Tagore : Gitanjali, Macmillan & Co. Ltd. London, 1966, p. 91.

IV

THE VOW OF SOCIO-PHILANTHROPIC SERVICE : ITS BEGINNING

INCEPTION OF SOCIO-PHILANTHROPIC SERVICE :

At this time Brahmachari Binode spent most of his time in meditation and engaged his attention to how to remove the sufferings of the poor and chastise the character of the young boys. These two thoughts developed the idea of forming a social service unit.

Brahmachari Binode was indeed a born leader, clad in white loin-cloth and a long loose sheet of cloth, bare-footed, with healthy mind in a sound frame. He appeared to be a symbol of a chaste man and it seemed that he was engrossed in some holy thoughts all the time. Whoever saw him was attracted by his towering personality. Gradually, a troop was organised under his able guidance. They would go from door to door to collect handful of rice as alms from every house once a week, usually on Sunday, and distributed the same to the really deserving persons.

One night when he was getting prepared to sit for meditation in the cremation-ground of the village, he saw flames coming out from the house of a Mohammedan. He instantly rushed to the spot, drew water from the pond, poured it in the thatched construction and thereby saved the suffering victim from the hungry flames, In one winter night a Mohammedan took him to the nearabout field and drew his attention to a man lying bare-bodied in that

chilly cold night. There was no sign of life in his body. Brahmachari Binode placed his hand close to his nose and felt that breathing was still continuing and he might be restored to life if proper care be taken. He told the Muslim fellow that the man should be taken anyhow to his ashram (hermitage). The Mohammedan ran to his house and came with a tin-sheet. In the meantime Binode's disciples and followers took the diseased man to the hermitage. They kindled fire by collecting dry leafs, small branches of trees and provided warmth to the man. About two hours later the man gained consciousness. At the directive of the Brahmachari they rushed to the Bhuinya house and fetched warm milk and the patient by and by felt better. The next morning, after treating him with food and drinks, Brahmachariji sent him home with a sum of Rupees two and a blanket given to him. The people near the area whispered that Sadhuji had given life back to a dead man.

As the canal flowing by the Bajitpur village had connection with the river Kumar, abundant fish used to be obtained from the canal. Every year fishermen from different villages would come to fetch fish from the canal. Once a fisherman coming from Barishal was attacked with cholera. He had a little boy with him and none else. Having got the news, Brahmachari Binode rushed to the spot and did whatever was possible, but the man died in the afternoon. Conservative elites of the village refused to take him to the crematory because the man was of a an unknown caste. Brahmachariji got furious and shouted, "What are they saying ? The dead man will not be cremated ! Dead man has no caste or creed". The Brahmachari along with his troop and Nishikanta Dutta collected big

branches of trees, prepared a pyre, placed the dead body on it, and cremated the body The minor son of the deceased man was sent to his village. This small nucleus that was initiated by these selfless persons of Bajitpur has grown all over India in the shape of the Bharat Sevasharam Sangha.

The Brahmachari always advised his followers that service to the suffering and helpless is the greatest religion and it pained him to see that the students and young boys were lamentably lacking in maintaining their character. In course of time great number of people and students began to come to him, but many a guardian did not like this. They felt that their sons would become monks. That being so, boys in large numbers came to him during the night without the knowledge of their guardians. Brahmachariji guided them to lead a pure life and obviously enough, some of these boys joined the revolutionaries and even embraced Sannyasa (ascetic mendicancy). Every Saturday and Sunday and on holidays the boys came to him and Brahmachari Binode would talk with them about sacrifice, self-restraint and truth, saying that these are the things that should be the ideal of life.

The then associates of Brahmachari Binode began to flock together in after life. In 1910/11, during his studentship at Bajitpur school, one young boy, as we have stated beforehand, became very familiar with him and that boy became the chief, the spiritual power-personality of Bharat Sevashram Sangha after the demise of Swami Maharaj Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji, as Srimat Swami Satchidanandaji Maharaj who is also no more amidst us. The Ex-General Secretary of the Sangha, Swami Atmanandaji

Maharaj too came close to Brahmachariji as a student. Srimat Swami Jogananda Maharaj, the present President and Treasurer would frequent the Sadhan-Kutir, and would attend youth-gatherings on every Saturday, Sunday and other holidays. Besides these persons of mobility and repute, Swami Shuddhanandaji (Kshitish), Swami Hariharanandaji (Bani Kanta), Swami Nirugnandaji (Jyotindra), Suresh Brahmachari and other local devotees used to come to Brahmachariji to hearken his wise, pithy sayings.

Inception and Installation of the Hermitage or his Divine Mission:

On the blessed day of the full moon (Purnima) of the month of Magh in 1322 B.S. (February, 1916 A.D.) Brahmachari Binode sat under a Kadamba tree (a kind of wild tree) and dived into deep meditation and it appeared that his face, his very countenance, manifested the holy sublimity of Lord Shiva. He gained pure salvation. The Ashram (hermitage) was established a year after, though it was not as yet named Bharat Sevashram Sangha. But in 1917 A.D. (1323 B. S.) on Maghi Purnima or the full moon day of Magh the ceremony held at this Bajitpur Ashram was yearmarked as the day of foundation of the celebrated Bharat Sevashram Sangha; since then function has been organised at Bajitpur Ashram on the auspicious date of his advent and on the date of his attaiment of Siddhi,

The Ashram of Bajitpur was started very modestly. The site was opposite to the extended tract of land full of wild plants and shrubs near the cremation-ground. It was also recognised as Vana-Durga Peeth or Burothakuranir Than (altar for worship of the Divine Mother). And this holy place was dearly loved by the

Brahmachari. In Summer and Winter, in this solitary place, Brahmachari Binode often sat in deep meditation. One day he expressed his desire to the young followers that he would set up an Ashram there. The news was heartening to everybody and with great enthusiasm construction started. A certain portion of land was cleared and the same was elevated by dumping earth. Then, few days later, a thatched hut was created there and the place of worship was shifted from Sadhana Kutir to this new hut and thus the foundation stone of Bharat Sevashram Sangha and Sri Sri Pranab Math (Monastery) was laid.

Then again Maghi Purnima day came. The followers of Swamiji began to collect rice and money with great enthusiasm and the villagers also came forward to help them in their mission. On the sacred morning of Maghi Purnima (the full moon day of the month of Magh) in February, 1917, the ceremony started with incessant chanting in praise of the Lord and thus the first day of consecration of the Sangha was celebrated. To the associates and disciples, Sangha-children and followers this day was very much adored and the leader of the Sangha himself wrote that during the next Maghi Purnima there would be mass meditation, mass devotion and mass dedication, so that they might realise the influence of religion and preachings, so that holy benediction might be showered on them to purify their soul.

After this installation of the Ashram the followers began to assemble everyday in the afternoon and on Sundays and Saturdays youths from neighbouring villages used to come for listening to his advice. Every evening the devotees participated in the Kirtana (act of

singing the praise of God), used to sing Shankaracharya's verse and other devotional songs. Some times Brahmachariji also participated with the followers in melodious, enchanting voice, and the atmoshpere was changed by his sombre recitals. He loved Hari Sankirtan (singing in chorus of Lord Hari or Krishna) so much and the village team under the direction of Fedu Kabiraj (Ayurvedic physician named Fedu following the Hindu science of medicine as taught in the Atharva-Veda) often joined the musical soiree. A new movement came into being centering round this Ashram. On the other hand, the boys continued their social service by collective device and every week they could collect 9/10 mounds (1 maund=a measure of weight: about 37 Kgs) of rice. They would meet the needs of the poor by the money obtained by selling the rice.[1]

The news of the austere penance, continence and socio-humanitarian service of Brahmachari Binode gradually spread over the surrounding country-side areas and towns of East Bengal and even beyond that many people took refuge under his motherly affection.

The land at Bajitpur where the Ashram was established and which was known as the shrine of 'Buro Thakurani' or the Divine Mother and the land adjoining to that belonged to Mahendra Nath Chakravorty, the son of the priest of Bhuinya family, as 'Debattar' property (a property endowed for defraying expenses of worshipping a deity) and Mahendra, who was senior to Binode, had great respect for him. He expressed his desire to make a gift of that land to Brahmachariji and in fact, after some time, he transferred the land in the name of Ashram. Before

leaving the place for his own he said, "well, Brahmachariji, many people say so many things about you, particularly wherefrom you have got this dynamic power". With a faint smile on his lips the Brahmachari replied, "I have launched out into this work with the combined force of Buddha, Shankara and Sri Chaitanyadeva". It is now for us to see that on the propitious day of Maghi Purnima of 1923 Swamiji would suggest and choose the meaningful epithet "Bharat Sevashram Sangha" as the very apt denomination of his Organisation in a mammoth gathering of the monks, dedicated workers and others in this Ashram of Bajitpur. Sri Sri Pranab Math (monastery/temple) was then in its infancy.

- Expansion of Social Service and Foundation of New Sevashrams or Hermitages for Worship or Humanitarian Service

In the month of Ashwin (the sixth month of the Bengali calendar from the middle of September to that of October) 1326 B S. [1919 A.D.] Bengal witnessed a severe cyclone which devastated particularly East Bengal taking a huge toll of human lives and demolishing houses of lakhs of people. Cattle force was destroyed, houses were demolished and the loud lamentation of heart misfortune of the helpless victims touched the golden of Brahmachari Binode. He along with his followers at this time launched voluntary service for proper relief to the endangered, distressed. At this time some respectable persons of Madaripur formed a committee in the name of *East Bengal Relief Committee* in the city of Calcutta and Madaripur Subdivision. Brahmachariji continued his service sometime aided by this Committee. As this work proceeded in very much systematic way

under the deft leadership of Swamiji, many idealistic youngmen joined him.

The people of Madaripur were deeply moved at the excellent services rendered by Brahmachari Maharaj and particularly the local leader late Surendra Nath Biswas came forward by the closing months of 1919 to establish Sevashram Sangha at Madaripur. By the enthusiasm of the local boys they continued their social services to feed the hungry, to nurse the sick, cremate the unclaimed dead bodies, aid the distressed and propagate moral and religious ideas and ideals to the masses, so that they might not lose either heart or hope. At the same time was arranged weekly collection of rice and money as funds from the villagers. Two young workers then known as Kumud and Madhu and later as the Ex-President of the Sangha Srimat Swami Satchidanandaji and the existing President Srimat Swami Joganandaji respectively, were unwearying in their mission. In July, 1920 A.D. (1327 B.S.) they proceeded to Khulna and came to the house of the local popular leader and lawyer late Nagendra Nath Sen. At that time, the private tutor imparting education in the house of Advocate Jyotish Ghosh was lying sick. These two young men at their own will took up the work of nursing the bed-ridden fellow, but unfortunately the patient did not survive. Being overwhelmed with wonder and admiration by the services rendered and hearing religious songs from their lips Sri Ghosh introduced them to the elites of the town ; having heard about their mission they agreed to set up Sevashram at Khulna and by their collective efforts a Sevanshram was establishd in the month of May, 1921. Inspired by this, the local boys of the schools and colleges also joined them. Brahmachariji directed them all to go

from house to house and collect whatever could be had in kind or cash. Thus, within a very brief span of time, two social service centres at Madaripur and Khulna named as Madaripur Sevashram and Khulna Sevashram respectively came into existence. The Calcutta Press corners and other news agencies published detailed information about the yeoman's service rendered by Brahmachari Maharaj and his workers. The Saint-Saviour got acquainted with the stalwarts of the country namely Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das and the other eminent leaders of our land, who got very much pleased when they came to know of the various activities of the architect and founder of Bharat Sevashram Sangha.

Drought prevailed continuously for years at Satkshira, a large sub-divisional town in the district of Khulna with the result that in 1921 a famine broke out in the region of Sundarban. The sufferings of the people rose to a saturating point. There was no food, no cloth, and people were dying in large numbers by swallowing food unfit for human consumption. Newspapers boomed this news. Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy and others took up the cause and began social service with funds and food obtained from different provinces, and Brahmachari Binode engaged himself in this relief work with his band of energetic, dedicated workers. He was then only twentyfive years old.

Sundarban was known as the land of tigers on land and crocodiles in waters. But dauntless, Brahmachari Maharaj continued his work without despair and repose. Swami Vedanandaji, who was then a young boy, joined him. He wrote : where the volunteers could not secure boats, they would cross the canals and rivers by swimming, forgetting the peril of the journey ;

they were inspired by Swamiji's advice, in him they could easily discover a nearest and dearest kinsman of theirs; so intense and irresistible was their personal entente with the Brahmachari. They used to submit their reports to Brahmachariji and their food was boiled rice and boiled green plantains. Days were not rare when they were to go without food. It was only possible by the sacred, hopeful counsel and vigilant, loving care coupled with motherly affection of Brahmachari Maharaj.

Towards the close of 1921 the famine relief work ceased and to provide the poor, wretched villagers with work during the whole year a broad-based scheme was formulated. Powerloom, spinning of thread in charka (spinning-wheel), spinning of mattress, making of cane furniture were undertaken, and for that purpose several more service units were installed in 1922 to impart training. Primary schools were set up; charitable dispensaries were also instituted wherefrom people could get medicine free of cost. In addition, in every village, a religious centre was founded. After the closure of relief work, almost all the volunteers returned to their respective houses, except a few selfless young boys; they were so much inspired that they could not leave their philosopher and guide.

In 1922-1923 North Bengal experienced a demolishing flood and Rajshahi, Bagura, Naogaon districts were severely affected. To serve the endangered people a committee was set up with Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy as the President, the illustrious Subhas Chandra Basu and Indranarayan Sengupta as Joint Secretaries of the North Bengal Flood Relief Committee. Acharya Prafulla Chandra requested Brahmachariji to supply

him some workers because they were sacrificing and painstaking ; he himself had witnessed their services at Ashasuni Centre. He made a clean breast of his praise for these workers to Swamiji : "I brought some students from the University of Calcutta, but they proved a failure. They always wanted to go back and I had to pay them train fares, etc. which amounted to a lump sum. Besides, they demanded breakfast and that too early. Your workers, on the contrary, do not claim such things". At the entreaty of Sri P. C. Roy, Brahmachari Maharaj gave him some of his workers. A group of twentyfive persons were sent to Santahar which was the Headquarters of the Relief Committee. From there they were sent to different places for social service. To give them impetus the Brahmachari also visited very many places in East Bengal. Accounts of his relief works were ventilated in the local newspapers. He had to look after day-to-day administration of the Sevashrams, different social services and service units, which were extended during this period. He had to run from one place to another like a shuttle cock. This time he had to come to Calcutta for collection of money and to facilitate his service. He took a rented room in 1922 at Bagbazar Dispensary Lane at a rent of Rs. 3/- (Rupees three) only per month. However much low the rent might be, the room was a blackhole and Brahmachariji resided there with four to five workers. They would move through the metropolis to secure money. In that dungeon-like room they had to cook their very modest diet. The Brahmachari and his workers would go to the bank of the Ganges to sleep at night When it rained, they came back again to this dungeon.

When the flood relief work came to a close,

Brahmachariji consecrated another permanent centre named "The Uttar Banga (North Bengal) Sevashram at Naogaon"; he also started a Students' Home for spiritual culture at Rajshahi. And with the gradually growing number of selfless workers in connection with missionary activities, the holy Maghi Purnima day of 1923 brought another large troop of young boys loyal and reverent to the life of renunciation and the vow of Brahmacharya or continence as envisaged by the ideal magnanimous Brahmachari.

During the early stage of Sangha life the aforesaid volunteers had to suffer in body, mind and spirit that beggars description. They had to conquer a long distance to go from North to South Calcutta on foot to collect subscription. The janitors or door-keepers of richer persons used to drive them away, snatch away their subscription books, and threw them away on the streets. The volunteers had to stand these things smilingly. After day's hard labour they would return and take only boiled rice and boiled potato But, by the blessings of the Saint-Saviour, they felt no trouble. The then Volunteer-in-Charge (later raised to the exalted status of Vice-Presidentcy of the Sangha Srimat Swami Bijnananandaji) left an account of that perilous period saying that they had to suffer inhuman afflictions and miseries to prove their ideas and ideals of self-sacrifice. Thus, undergoing endless hardships and sufferings, the great Saint-Saviour embracing these devoted young workers with motherly affection and care was sowing the seeds of his cherished Mission.

In the year 1922 Brahmachariji left the dungeon of Bagbazar and in the month of Bhadra (the fifth month in the Bengali calendar) hired a brick-built two-roomed

flat at Shovabazar at a rental of Rs. 18/- (Rupees eighteen) only per month and the Ashram (Hermitage) was shifted there. One Brahmachari and a few volunteers would reside there and while in Calcutta Brahmachari Maharaj also resided with them. In June 1924, he removed to a house at 27, Bowbazar Street and from there to 162, Cornwallis Street in 1926, 24/3, Mirjapur Street in July, 1927 and at last at 211, Rash Behari Avenue, Ballygunge in May, 1932,[2] and since then these premises have been known as the Head Quarters of Bharat Sevashram Sangha. Acceptance of any conditional gifts was quite contrary to his principle, he was always unwilling to raise funds by performance of charity shows of films or dramas ; and the Sangha, his monumental and magnificient creation, has ever been guided by his noble ideas and ideals.

In 1922 Brahmachari Maharaj for the first time initiated a band of volunteers in mystic and esoteric words in prayer to God as Brahmacharis (those who after practising abstinence from sensual and other worldly pleasures prepare to join an order of hermits). In February 1923, all the Brahmacharis assembled at the beautiful, holy hermitage of Bajitpur on the Maghi Purnima day and here the name of the Sangha was confirmed as Bharat Savashram Sangha. He said, "This Sangha will be second to Buddha's Sangha and I want to bring it up with the ideas and ideals of Buddha, Shankara and Chaitanya."

Having named this organisation as Bharat Sevashram Sangha, he intended to create a moral strength—an incorporated power or force. The entire India would be the working place of the Sangha. It is the object of the Sangha to reorient India's

nationality, and principles of the Vedas would be its foundation. In the year 1924, we have mentioned beforehand, he came to Allahabad on the auspicious occasion of Ardh Kumbha, met Swami Gobindananda Giri, was initiated into asceticism by him, and came to be known as Acharya Swami Pranavananda. The same year in the month of February on the Maghi Purnima day, he initiated his first batch of associates and young ascetics into the institution of Sannyasa (courting asceticism following renouncement of mundane pleasures and comforts) and thus the foundation of his cherished "Dharmachakra" (laws or directives conductive to attaining final salvation) and "Karmachakra" (path of work and sacrifice) was laid on a strong plinth. February 1924 was indeed a memorable month in the history of the Sangha, for of the seven persons initiated by him to 'mantras' (mystic and esoteric hymns) of *Sannyasa* were seven great men after Acharyadev, who shaped the Sangha. The first of them was Srimat Swami Satchidanandaji Maharaj, the second President of the Sangha, who belonged to the Maitra family of Kalagachia (Faridpur) and was then named Kumud ; the second, Srimat Swami Bijnanananda ji who hailed from Pratap Mahal, a village of Barishal, his father named his Sri Narayana ; the next, Srimat Swami Vedanandaji, who belonged to Jessore district hailing from the village of Suphalkathi, his name was Amulya.

The compassionate social worker with efficiency in administrative works and one of the renowned revolutionaries of "Anushilan Samity", Madhusudan, later known as Srimat Swami Joganandaji, the present President of the Sangha was born in Bilaskhan village in the district of Faridpur. The next, Srimat Swami

Adwaitanandaji alias Rajendra, came from Verchi, Jessore. Another worthy son of the Maitra family of Kalagachia, Faridpur, Sri Nikunja was named as Srimat Swami Atmanandaji after initiation. And the last one Srimat Swami Nirgunanandaji, who spent his last life in practice of religious austerities in the Himalayas, also belonged to Alipur in Faridpur ; his father named him as Jyotindra.[3]

Be it mentioned in this connection that the biographies, works, collected letters and apothegms of the World-Teacher and Saint-Saviour written and published by Swami Vedanandaji, Swami Atmanandaji, Swami Adwaitanandaji and Swami Nirmalanandaji will ever stand as priceless treasures to the votaries and in the casket of literature dealing with Divine Lives.

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V

THE DIVINE CONSTITUTOR OF THE DIVINE MISSION

That many a person falsely and foolishly accuse religion as the mainspring of superstitions and differences among sects and cults is highly regrettable indeed. There runs a wrong idea that had there been only one religion in India, it would expedite political integrity. There are persons also who hold wrong notion about caste and varnas prevalent in India from time immemorial. Acharya Swami Pranavanandaji ably recaptured the fundamental unity of the people of India in apparent diversity, vindicating the genuine spirit of religion as the foundation of this unity. He was fully aware of this diversity—diversity of faiths, food, fashion and traits and of the truth that to belittle or ignore this diversity is to undo the individual entity and human liberty. Indian religion—the Sanatan Dharma—recognises and reveres these apparent differences and yet keeps the society conscious of the ultimate unity that binds all men together. It is this which accounts for religion's guiding the polity, social laws, economic ventures, inheritance, marriage systems, laws of warfare and peace, and what not. Credit goes to the torchbearer of this Sanatan Dharma for his recognising and admitting the same divinity in all men favoured with opportunities through its socio-econimic structure to develop the same.

Religion and true religious outlook cannot be held responsible for India's communal discords and national disintegration. On the contrary, Swamiji Maharaj

asserts, true religious outlook can be a potent prop to national harmony, unity and peace. Religious conflicts, he believed, are nothing but the creation of motivated politics or vested secular interests and as such much of the malady could easily be wiped out if religion could be treated as service to humanity par excellence. Acharya Swami Pranavanandaji from his personal involvement and practical experiences valued high the social service by his Mission. Who could know better than he that human service in genuine spirit stands for the real service to God ? And it was he who believed that humanitarian service with religious attitude could solve all the existing and future problems of India and the world.

We have seen erstwhile how, after his formal initiation to the spiritual life by Yogiraj Gambhirnathji, the Divine Boy Binode, delving deep in meditation and blessed with the heavenly ecstasy of realisation of the super-conscious state, led a life of absolute isolation and then in February, 1916, on the holy day of Maghi Purnima, attained the great illumination that enkindled him to organise his Mission—the Bharat Sevashram Sangha—and set it on its feet by internal and external discipline in 1917, he himself acting as the pivot round which the life and spirit of his universal spiritual Fraternity or Brotherhood of ascetic mendicants and sacrificing workers revolves. The Sangha is purely a philanthropic and charitable organisation with "non-communal and non-political character and outlook"[1].

Ideology and Distinctive Features of the Sangha :

The Divine Preceptor had an intense yearning for reinstatement of the ancient Vedic ideals and he consti-

tuted his Mission on the same. He who keenly desired to help and enable his disciples manifest fully their blossoming religiosity by infusing in them his individual celestial spirit, could thus settle and collocate things to build up a congenial environment and work steadily with a heart surcharged with fathomless love and paternal care till he gained the desired reciprocity. Acharya Swami Pranavananda, in the year 1922, on the propitious day of Maghi Purnima, initiated the first batch of the Brahmacharis into the order of ascetic mendicaney. In February, 1923, all the Brahmacharis and devoted workers participated sn the Maghi Purnima ceremony. And at the close of the gala festive occasion, in a seminar presided over by 'Swami Maharaj' it was decided that the Mission would be called Bharat Sevashram Sangha. In that gathering Swamiji said, "The Mission of ours shall be the Second Sangha of Gautam Buddha ; I intend to invigorate the entire land and the nation on the ideals and forces of ascetic, religious austerities of Buddha, Shankara and Chaitanya".

The ephithet "Bharat Seveshram Sangha" was chosen and adopted and thereon the Acharya declared with exposition of ideology behind the ephithet : "I wish to create a guild or an association of unity and integrity. The whole of India is the sphere of work of this Brotherhood. The re-organisation or rejuvenation of India harmonising with its perennial ideas and ideals being the primary object of the Sangha in which the word "Bharat" must needs be inserted ; the word 'Ashram' is an indication of the ideals of the ancient Varnashram system that was prevalent and at work with disciplined exercise of renunciation, self restraint, truth and temperance ; 'Seva' brings concept of duty or

service inspired by a broad religious outlook characterising Hinduism, for which all social services were regarded as "Dharma" (religion) in India in the days of yore—the Sangha will function as a philanthropic, charitable and welfare organisation with true sons of our soil who are also servants of the nation serving the people by rendering physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social activities of diverse sorts ; and as the Sangha is the other name of the organisation, my Sangha will be a flaming organised body". The life and soul of this vast organisation being Acharyadeva himself and his Sangha-children, the dedicated and devoted monks and workers were its different living organs.

The Sangha is indeed a "Nation-building movement on the basis of Universal ideals of Indian Culture[2]. It epitomises its aims, objects and purposes in the very denomination of the Organisation. A religious brotherhood of the Sannyasins (Monks) and selfless workers"[3] dedicated to the service of humanity, its very aims and objects bespeak its multiplex services for human welfare. The Mission's adopted rules of conduct or principles are moral and spiritual elevation controlled by self-discipline and humanitarian service, concordantly blended and founded on Vedantic teachings of the Sages of ancient India.

● AIMS AND OBJECTS OF THE SANGHA

The aims and objects of this magnanimous Mission as defined and interpreted in its Memorandum[4] are :

(1) To aid the distressed, nurse the sick, feed the hungry and to clothe the naked ;

(2) To offer relief during natural disasters like, flood, famine etc ;

(3) To foster dissemination of the fruits of knowledge and education and come to the succour of the infirm, invalid, afflicted mankind by installing and maintaining free academic and medical institutions and other associations of charity in various parts of home and abroad ;

(4) To redress and meliorate the socio-economic condition of the masses with encouragement of home industry, irrespective of caste and creed ;

(5) To promote moral and spiritual growth of the nation ;

(6) To keep up and uphold the spiritual, cultural heritage of India of the distant past ;

(7) To improve and enhance a feeling of sympathy, compassion, tolerance and union amongst the votaries of all faiths and good will for evolving peaceful co-existence—"Live, and let live".

(8) Particular, special upliftment of the backward classes, the down-trodden and outcastes and the tribals through educational amenities extended to them.

Swamiji enunciated several distinctive traits to serve immense and diverse purposes of his organisation as suggested below :

(a) The Mission serves the purpose of a mouthpiece of regular, orderly propagation of moral, religious and spiritual ideas and ideals from door to door ;

(b) the monks and ascetics of the Brotherhood living and having their sway solitarily, are

often exposed to a possible retreat from their ideals, and may violate their solemn, formal undertakings or resolve in the midst of allurement, trials and tribulations. But that cannot be, as they are favoured with opportunities as preaching parties en masse, leading their lives in the pristine environment of hermitage with observance of regular meditation or spiritual abstraction, congregated prayer, perusal of religious scriptures, and so on ;

(c) the preaching parties comprise no less than twelve spirited trained workers who could easily hold magnum socio-religio performances shortly and make them grand success ;

(d) in the event of natural disasters falling upon any part of the country, the authorities concerned give necessary relief to the endangered mankind by rushing instantly to the affected areas with unstinted assistance and co-operation of the trained workers of the preaching parties and thereby striving to tackle the impasse ;

(e) the Sangha was and has been at work in maintaining mass popularity and mass contact through its itinerant preaching trains who are even on the move from place to place and from door to door in so many provinces ; and

(f) these itinerant preaching teams preach the aims and objects of the Sangha and collect voluntary contributions either in coin or in kind regularly and thus have become the great force of the Sangha.

In fine, Acharyadev secured a Memorandum of Association of his spiritual brotherhood of monks and dedicated workers prepared with its aims and purposes as recognised by the Government which are as follows :—

(i) Spiritual and cultural propaganda and religious reform ;

(ii) spread of education based on the ideal of moral and religious notions and mottos ;

(iii) sanctification of the sacred places visited by pilgrims and re-orientation of their environment prevailing in the past ;

(iv) philanthropic and charitable works ;

(v) activities concerning social reformation and organisation ; and

(vi) spread of Indian cultural heritage abroad.

RULES AND CONSTITUTION OF THE SANGHA

A Board of Trustees of the monks of the Sangha formed and registered legally under Act XXI of 1860 in the name "Bharat Sevashram Sangha" in the General Committee included monastic and non-monastic members of the Organisation, but the Governing Body having only its Trustees, the great spiritual master of this God-ordained Mission himself stood at the helm of affairs bearing the brunt of its mainfold activities as the life-long President and Treasurer. It was the Governing Body which organised and maintained affairs of all the branch-centres and their services with the result that—

(a) the Sangha authorities kept all the dedicated temporary workers under direct supervision at their behest ;

(b) The Governing Body could keep *all the resources under its control* ;

(c) the entire strength and resources of the Sangha could be concentrated at any spot and at any moment by the authority concerned as and when needed ;

(d) Acharyadev carried on his noble mission of life-building of the sacrificing, devoted souls, the monks and Brahmacharis, the volunteers and workers of the Sangha undaunted by equipping them with moral and spiritual training, as he considered them to be the veritable life, the pillars of the Sangha-structure who inwardly have one mind, one feeling, one intellect and one power though outwardly they possess each his individual distinctive identity and existence ;

(e) the entire Organisation seemed to be an integrated, indivisible gamut or living organism, the omniscient, indefatigable and unerring Acharya as the most dependable, sustaining force and guide with his magnetic personality : he set in motion compulsory congregation of all the monastic members and workers of the Sangha twice yearly for a scheduled period of time at his command. And, at the same time, by maintaining internal discipline of the Sangha-life, he inspired and instructed his spiritual children how to keep or hold the

Sangha intact and save it from disintegration, which came in print in the form of an invaluable book entitled 'Sangha-Geeta' (The Divine Hymn or incantation of the Sangha), and this 'Sangha-Geeta' may be linked to Srimat Bhagawat Geeta or the Upanishad or Dhammapada, so to say.

The Acharya, projecting his Divine Power and personality on the bigger body of his soul, desired to revitalise the principle and mode of life on the Vedic ideals that are quite compatible with the go of modern life. The Vedic Aryans would express their yearning and striving for eternal life, virility and strength in chanting prayers. Acharyadev was always vigilant to guard off his loving sons against any kind of outward malign influence for which all the children of the Sangha were initiated in the compulsory mode of living, swaying and rendering services collectively in all circumstances, defraying expenses of the Sangha by taking voluntary gifts or contributions from door to door throughout the country ; they were rigidly prohibited from acceptance of any conditional gift or donation. For them he emphasised the old noble practice of Indian ascetics—that of taking alms from each and every house in every nook and corner as means of their subsistence. Development of heartfelt sympathy and amiable friendship to all, not living apart with indifference to others—the spirit of universal co-existence and co-operation—was championed by the Sangha-Guru who very often made it quite clear to his disciples that since after installation of his 'Sangha' by Buddha two thousand five hundred years ago, the people of India have been in the dark as regards having notion

or experience about 'Sangha' (Organisation) and organisation activities, though there is abundance of hermitages, monasteries and shrines of so many religious communities. The monk-followers would have to maintain iron discipline and restraint in respect of food, dress and habits by shunning ease and delicious, rich diet, luxury and comfort and lead an existence of absorbing cogitation. Just as the solar system gets life and aid from the Sun at the centre round which planets and satellites revolve, though along their own orbits, so also the Sangha is enlivened and strengthened by the Acharya who stands like Apollo as the spring-head of its strength.

• THE SANGHA AS THE DEPOSITORY OF THE POWERS AND IDEALS OF THE AGE.

The Sangha being the depository of the ideals and forces of the age, a living organism like a human body functioning entirely at the dictates of the centre, i.e. the brain, the Acharya asserted that it would have to be 'the seed bed' of the prospective promising Hindu Nation and by the inscrutable immanent Divine Dispensation and Will, would be exalted to such an acme of glory and power as to guide the whole world to the cherished goal of liberation, peace and bliss[7]. Just as Gautama Buddha himself was the brain and spirit of his unique Sangha, so also was Pranavanandaji himself the brain and soul of his Sangha the entire function of which was, is and would be carried on at his guidance. The Divine Builder of the Divine Mission and the harbinger of Hinduism and Hindu culture, the Acharya entrusted the Sangh with the solemn responsibility of propagating the greatness and glory of the Hindu society as a whole, the essential

norms and systems of individual, homely and social life of the Hindus indiscriminately including the whole rank and file. It is Sangha-Shakti or collective force and collective endeavour by integrating smaller units of forces with a view to performing greater work, he emphasised, is a must to infuse strength and virility in men and women who dread to face and solve every affair for want of prowess and energy. It is Sangha-Shakti which is the key to unthinkable success like the unimportant petty straws which, when put and collected together, can tie down a mammoth elephant. An epitome of the Hindu Society, Bharat Sevashram Sangha is moulding the Hindu religion and culture of the present day and giving it a catholic character. By carrying to its logical conclusions the Vedanta doctrines of the identity of man with God, it has confirmed the fundamental equality of man on a solid foundation coupled with its other doctrine that all religions, if truly pursued, are but different ways to emancipation and that there can be no intrinsic conflict between one religion and another, it has offered a sure solution of the most intricate problem of the day.

• MULTIPLEX ACTIVITIES OF THE DIVINE MISSION AT HOME AND ABROAD

(a) Bharat Sevashram Sangha, a socio-religious-philanthropic, non-political and genuinely secular Organisation maintains and superintends 36 units in various places of the land and permanent religio-cultural centres in alien countries like Trinidad, Guyana (South America), New York, Toronto (Canada) London, where academic institutions also are governed by the Sangha with the aid and

assistance of a monastic member heading each centre in unison with local monks and lay assistants initiated to the spiritual doctrines of the Mission. Besides these permanent centres, the Sangha maintains more than three hundred rural welfare units known as Milan Mandirs (Unity Centres) in various places of India with a view to reorienting the disintegrated Hindus, the largest majority of our country and ameliorating the wretched condition of the aboriginals. A common platform and a tryst of the Hindus of all classes and creeds, all castes and sub-castes, the Milan Mandir is indeed a holy pedestal where untouchability, casteism and parochial sectarianism voluntarily disappear like bubbles and die out. The Sangha finds it convenient to spread its messages and benefaction of service through the rural-based units of welfare services for the scheduled castes and Tribes.

(b) Besides preaching of spiritural and cultural ideas through trained ascetics in India and abroad, reformation of sacred places and occasional relief works in disastrous natural calamities, the Sangha helps the pilgrims a lot during festive occasions like fairs and religious congregations and offers medical aids. The Sangha has never failed to conduct welfare centres for the pilgrims regularly in various holy shrines of India and extends possible aid and facilities to the countless pilgrims.

(c) To regenerate the Hindu Society including the Tribals in its elevated ideals, uniting all Hindus

under one universal culture, preaching the inculcation of physical culture for building strong physique with sound mind and developing the youths of the land so as to constitute a puissant nation. the Sangha maintains gymnasiums and physical training institutes in all renowned centres and Milan Mandirs ; it also patronises national village sports and games.

(d) As Swamiji Maharaj came forward to build up the nation on the basis of its spiritual and moral ideas and ideals, he wanted to re-introduce spiritual and moral education. He intended to impress upon the mind of the confounded people amid prevailing chaos the need of perusal of scriptures in different channels. With this end in view, the Sangha—

(i) instituted a department in 1949 for organising scriptural studies and holding examinations of the students and juvenile learners, which has been working since then, maintaining a regular graduated Syllabus of studies of the two Indian epics, other scriptures and the Geeta for the students of various classes ;

(ii) has been teaching scriptures through trained teachers and preachers ;

(iii) distributing copies of scriptures gratis among the students ;

(iv) holding Annual Examinations of the 3 year course and awarding merit certificates, prizes etc. to the successful candidates ; and

(v) imparting lessons of scriptures in the rural areas through projection of lantern slides demonstrated with instructive and illuminating lectures by the monastic members of the Sangha.

(e) At least (no less than) five journals upholding the glorious ideals of Indian culture, education, age-old traditions and spiritual teachings—the Pranav, a Bengali monthly from Calcutta Head office, a Gujrati monthly from Surat, one English Bi-monthly from Bombay, and an English paper from Canada with their wide circulations, more than one hundred religious books and lacs of leaflets in different languages are published for moral and spiritual betterment of the general masses.

(f) The Sangha undertakes various schemes for the all out welfare of scheduled castes and tribes, pertaining to socio-economic, physical, academic and moral affairs.

(g) The universal religio-cultural heritage of India with acceptance of all men as sons of Divinity has been propogated by Swami Pranavanandaji through all the branches of the Sangha which organises a good number of libraries and reading rooms, regular classes and discussions, public functions and celebrations. Again, the monastic members and workers of the Sangha and Milan Mandirs take part in the functions organised by public religio-cultural associations on invitation and inspire the people in their socio-cultural progress. Thus, people are

linked up with the ideals of the Sangha through such clubs and associations.

As per General Report (1992-93), the Sangha organised spiritual discussions weekly on the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Upanishads, the Geeta and other religio-cultural topies at Raja Srinath Hall in Calcutta Head Office, Bharatiya Sanskriti Mandir (Temple) at Garia Sevashram, Diamond Harbour Sevashram and other branches throughout the year in which scholarly persons and the senior Sangha-monks were participants. Spiritual guidance to thousands of aspiring souls for leading better way of life in the society was imparted by the revered President, Vice President and other well experienced monks of the noble Mission. Students and youngsters 'past tale of number' were inspired to build up their character because of the moral teachings of the Sangha-chief showered upon them.

(h) For the purpose of acquainting the Indians and the Indians living overseas with the cultural wealth of Indian life, the Sangha has extended its activities abroad by organising several Missions and sending the preaching teams to the East African States, West Indies, South America, England, Malayasia, Indonesia and other countries in the far East. In addition to this, the Sangha, it has already been stated, runs permanent centres in London, Canada, New York, Guyana and Trinidad.

These foreign preaching units hold classes of the Ramayana, the Geeta, the Yogas and Indian languages not merely for emigrants from India but also for the non-Indians. Occasional religious ceremonies at the

time of Shivaratri, Maghi Purnima, Basanti Puja (worship of the Divine Mother Durga), Lakshmi Puja, Dewali, Janmastami (the 8th lunar day of the dark fortnight of the fifth month in the Bengali Calendar when Lord Krishna was born) etc. at different places and abodes of the devotees are also organised under the auspices of these organisers. They also hold conferences in which the elites of the society participate and harangue on religious and cultured topics.[8]

● TYPE OF ACTIVITIES

The activities of the Sangha may be broadly classified as follows :

(i) The Sangha has been organising a few hundreds of well trained sacrificing monks of highly advanced spiritual order for the purpose of fostering an atmosphere favourable to moral, spiritual rejuvenation of the multitude. In its Matha (monastery) centres and hermitages in significant places of home and abroad, it has deputed these ascetic mendicants to augment and vindicate the mission of the Sangha.

(ii) Many a trained monastic members, as many as eight or nine batches of highly enlightened and spiritually advanced ascetics and individual preachers innumerable go on with socio-religious, philanthropic activities and propagation of culture throughout India and foreign lands.

(iii) The Sangha, as we have hinted erst, has been involved in reliefs of various types in periods of national emergency and natural calamity

like earthquake, drought, famine, fire, epidemic, flood, cyclone, Tornado, refugee distress, riots, war evacuee, and undertakes relief work also in gala religious fairs held annually or occasionally in very important holy places, viz, Gaya Pitripaksha, Hardwar, Banaras (Kashi) Annakut, Puri Ratha Jatra, Allahabad and Ujjain Kumbha Fair, Gangasagar Fair almost since its inception.

(iv) The Sangha conducts more than 29 Charitable dispensaries at the Head Office and in different branches covering more than 6.5 lacs of patients to offer medical relief to the pilgrims and the afflicted people of the locality. A permanent fund created by Kumar P. N. Roy Charitable Trust for maintenance of these Charitable dispensaries attached to the Sangha's Nabadwip, Banaras, Hardwar and Diamond Harbour centres has ben most active and prompt in this regard since its installation.

Moreover, the Sangha runs relief operations on the occasions of fire relief, poor feeding, students' relief etc. in the form of distributing dry and cooked food, clothes, blankets, utensils, medical assistance, and so on.

(v) There are permanent centres for pilgrim welfare run by the Sangha in significant shrines of Gaya, Banaras, Allahabad, Kurukshetra, Brindaban, Gouri Kunda, Kedarnath, Puri, Nabadwip, Gangasagar, New Delhi, Dwarka, Rameswaram, Badrinath etc. These welfare centres extend all possible help and facilities by serving

the nemerous pilgrims with lodging, food, medicine and guidance.

(vi) The Sangha runs nearly one hundred academic institutions like Primary Schools, Night Schools, Junior Basic Schools, Junior High and High Schools, a considerable number of students' Homes, one Women's College at Dimapur and a Hindu College abroad (Guyana in South America), libraries, reading rooms and book banks. Students from backward and tribal communities are provided with special priority and care. As per Secretary's Report of Annual Activities of 1399 B. S. (1992-93 A. D.), the Sangha extended help in the form of book grant to 1254 poor and meritorious students, monthly stipend and other educational aid to 369 poor students reading in Engineering and Medical Colleges for which a students' Relief Fund had been formed. In some Secondary Schools and Students' Homes, students are tutored to take lessons of morality and religiosity and to carry on the austerities of penance, meditation etc. through practice.

Furthermore, Seminars and Symposia on Culture and Education are held in different Schools and colleges in various parts of the land and abroad under the auspices of the Sangha throughout the year which are attended by illustrious men of education and monastics of high spiritual level, the embodiments of India's spirit of glorious tradition and culture. Books and periodicals published in this regard remind the students of India's noble heritage and

obviously infuse in them an enthusiasm of sacrifice and service.

The academic institutions of the Sangha have a wide reputation for their high standard of discipline and morality, demonstration of the commendable character of their ex-students.

(vii) Amongst the young learners Pranavananda-system of man-making educalion has been introduced by the Sangha in its school-managements for building up their moral nature on the basis of the ideals of Indian culture

(viii) The Sangh undertook a project for Leprosy control in Bihar in accordance with SET pattern approved by the Government of Bihar and the Central Government. The Jamshedpur Branch deserves special mention, since it has been rendering yeoman's service since 1980 for the treatment of lepers and their reinstatement in Jamshedpur City, Patka and Rainagar Blocks and a vast area of Ghatsila Branch. 40,000 lepers were treated medically in a project for seven years, under three units through 62 clinics—30 in the Urban and 32 in the rural areas comprising 812 villages and towns of badly affected Singhbhum district. Three full-fledged hospitals —one at Davanki in a Tribal region, and the other two at Sidgora and Burmamines in Jamshedpur with 100 beds—are run by this Project of Leprosy Control. It is heartening to note that 12,000 patients had recoverd fully from this pernicious ailment and were on the way of rehabilitation by obtaining training in

weaving and spinning, sewing and shoe-making, bandage rolling and pulling 91 rickshaws and a few cycle vans. An old-age Home for lepers named after Acharyadev 'Pranavananda Shantidham' constructed by the Mission at Burmamines has accommodated 80 totally invalid lepers and is looking carefully to their necessities.

In addition to provision for medical care, the children of lepers residing in the colonies are being enlightened with education by the monastic workers of the Mission.

World Health Organisation (WHO) Workshop and a National Conference of Voluntary Welfare associations on Leprosy and refresher courses were also organised many times for betterment of the leprosy patients at the Steel town and Ghatsila. Besides these, the Sangha has been running Eye Clinics, Eye Operation Camps since long for the poor victims of leprosy along with special reforming Surgery Camps.

(ix) Not only in Jamshedpur or Ghatsila, but also in other rural areas and towns the Sangha conducts free Eye Clinics, free Eye Operation Camps and Homeo Charitable dispensaries with its medical units.

Be it stated here that the Sangha through Ahemedabad, Raiganj, Aurangabad, Suri, Siliguri, Calcutta, Allahabad, Banaras, Jamshedpur, branches in the village areas of hill tribes at Dediapara in Bhoroch district in Gujrat, Dokra, Barajuri, Chinsurah, Haripal, Nagaland and elsewhere launched mobile medical units.

(x) Social welafare services for tribals and Scheduled Castes, removal of untouchabilily and elevation of Indian Culture amongst them are note-worthy in this context.

With this end in view, the Sangha

(i) holds pablic gatherings social performances, mass prayer, community feeding, demonstrations by lantern slides, lectures and discussions on the evils of untouchability, etc. ;

(ii) Schools, adult education centres, ideal students' Homes. etc. are run by the Sangha for furtherance of academie amenities ; at the same time annual journals and souvenirs are brought out from Bambay, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Jabalpur, Jamshedpur and other places ;

(iii) pecuniary aid with occasional relief in the from of distribution of food, clothes, medicine etc. is provided too for the needy and poverty-striken untouchables by the benevolent Mission.

Welfare services for these wretched weaker Section of masses in the districts of Malda, Murshidabad, Bankura, Birbhum, 24-Parganas, West Dinajpur and Purulia in West Bengal, Jamshedpur in Bihar, Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh and Didiapara in Gujrat are conducted by the Sangha.

The Sangha provides the Tribal and backward class students with free board and lodging, clothings and academic equipments, free education and training in agriculture along with academic excursion in addition to running

Ashram-type hostels at Dokra, Dholkat—Pukuria (Jhargram) and Horekhali in the district of Midnapore, Siliguri, Balurghat, Raiganj, Kumarganj, Kunor, Teor in West Dinajpur, Ranibandh in Bankura, Aurangabad in Murshidabad, Sahapur in Malda, Jamshedpur, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad. Free reading rooms, free medical aid, physical training etc. are also extended to Scheduled Castes and Tribal Communities by some of these welfare units.

(xii) Relief services of the Mission have been expanded in almost every nook and corner of the rural areas of Banaras district in Uttar Pradesh and other provinces through distribution of clothes, blankets, propagation of Indian cultural heritage on many occasions among Harijans and other back-ward communities.

(xiii) Spiritual and cultural performances inclusive of mass meetings and conferences in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya, Maharastra, Gujrat and other provinces of India were held during 1992-93 by seven preaching teams comprising ascetic mendicants and devoted workers of the Sangha. Thousands of moral teaching and cultural conferences in India and abroad—1660 Vedic Sacrifices (Yajnas), 3550 weekly, monthly and occasional functions have been organised under 300 Milan Mandirs and their Rural Welfare units approved by the Sangha. The Sangha under its auspices has already observed ceremonial occasions like the memorable sacred

Birthday of the Sangha-Lord, and the anniversaries of branches of the Sangha with solemnity. We have dealt with spiritual Publications and organisations of Religious Discourses beforehand. Coupled with these, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Jabalpur, Jamshedpur and other branches published Souvenirs in quite a befitting manner.

(xiv) Srimat Swami Joganandaji Maharaj, the Revered President, inaugurated on 13.11.1993 Sri Sri Pranavananda Gurukul Prashikshan (Masterdcm Training) College at Garia in the suburbs of Calcutta with his blessings and religious teachings to the trainees in its second session. The members of the teaching staff were Swami Vikashanandaji, General Secretary, Swami Arupanandaji, General Secretary, Swami Nirmalanandaji, Joint Secretary, Swami Buddhanandaji, Swami Ashokanandaji, Swami Hiranmayanandaji, Dr. Sitanath Goswami and Dr. Subesh Kuiti. As many as 20 Brahmacharis were taught in various subjects indespensable to religious preachers and social workers for furtherance of progres of their ability and work

To give this training college for the ascetics a permanent shape and form, a permanent fund for its proper maintenance, the Sangha has built up a building with lump sum donation received from persons of benevolence like Sri Nanda Kr. Dutta etc.

(xv) The Divine Founder of the Divine Mission regarded the youths as the backbones of a

nation. He would very often help them to build up their nhysical prowess and moral character in order to constitute a mighty nation. Keeping his mission in view, the Sangha has set up Gymnasiums and physical training institution sin number of branches and Milan Mandirs with the following main units :

Calcutta Head Office & Shraddhananda Park (Calcutta).

Garia and Kakdwip, (24-Parganas / South).

Nabadwip (Nadia),

Dokra (Midnapore), Sutahata-Horekhali,

Bankura, Lumbding (Assam), Gaya, Jamshedpur, Ahmedabad, Surat etc.

Considering that for physical and moral development of the younger posterity and of the mass as well practice of Yogasana (posture of sitting for yogic meditation) is highly needed at present in academic institutions and other social welfare organisations, the Sangha also has been most active and prompt to conduct several such yoga Training Centres since long in different parts of the land.[9]

We cannot help mentioning in this connection that the monastic workers and volunteers of the Sangha spared no pains to work in saving pilgrims from drowning and controlling gatherings of thousands of Sadhus and millions of pilgrims hailing from all over India to Nasik for a holy dip in Godavari River at Ramkunda on the blessed occasion of Sinhasth Kumbha

Fair in August, 1991, when the management of such massive crowds was a mammoth job. The demonstration of their selfless and untiring service was exemplary and worthy of admiration and praise by all quarters. Again, the commendable service of the Medical Unit of the Sangha of Aurangabad in the devastating flood-affected area of Farakka in 1991, of the Medical Relief Camps of the Sangha at Basudevpur and within Dhuliyan Municipality in Murshidabad district giving Medical care to the victims of flood with supply of food and medicines in the same year was appreciated by all and sundry in the Government and private levels.

● ACHARYA'S CLARION CALL

Hundreds and thousands of selfless young men did rally around Acharya Swami Pranavananda at his clarion call. "The essence of religion", he exhorted, "is in practice, performance and realisation". His twin motto were self-awareness and humanitarian services which he inculcated in the Divine Mission he founded. He left no stones unturned to mould the life and character of these spirited youths surrounding him, who became his disciples and formed this spiritual Brotherhood of monks and sacrificing workers, and he trained them up to the pattern of his own life and character in the practice of the ideal of self-realisation and various philanthrophic social services to help and save the afflicted souls in dire need and ennoble them in

their physio-moral, spiritual, academic and cultural life. The organisation of these selfless devoted workers has assumed worthseeing form in dimension and importance swiftly.[10]

THE SANGHA'S CLARION CALL

"Mankind irrespective of creeds, faiths and vocations, rich and poor, householder or Sannyasi, if they, by any means, directly or indirectly come in contact with the Sangha-Lord, Sangha-Sakti or Sangha activities, their ideal and knowledge will evolve most speedily and will lead them to the path of Salvation and immortal Bliss".[11]

The Sangha sends its thundering summon to the pan Indians and the mankind as a whole without distinction of class and creed to come onward and assemble under the banner of the magnanimous Mission to expedite and further progress of their liberation.

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VI

THE UNIVERSAL NATION-BUILDING PROPHET

VIGOROUS MORAL AND SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS

When Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji was only Binode, his principal thought was how to turn youths into a morally guarded militia by purifying their lives. And then when he formulated Dharmachakra and Karmachakra, at that time also he paid most of his attention to the moral upliftment of the youth community. He had a very careful eye to see that their character could stand on a solid foundation of restraint and morality. Want of restraint amongst the students pained him very much. The posterity, if not enriched with moral code, are sure to go astray so that the future of the country would be shrouded with darkness. When he was a student, having observed this bankruptcy among the students he told the Headmaster of the School, "Sir, you do not know, but I know that the students are suffering from very bad instinct opposite to moral code. They will be ruined and the future of the land will also be ruined. A man—a man—I am searching out a man. If the youths of our country are not properly guided and attain manhood, it is no good running after freedom or liberation. But I find, there is nobody to guide them. They have to be brought back and have to be initiated with the ideals of ancient India." The Headmaster has added to this recollection of his about Binode's studentship during School days : "While uttering these words, Binode would leave deep sigh, his eyes became tearful and his countenance represented a strong conviction."

Whenever Acharyadev moved from one place to another, the students in batches came to him and he used to impart teachings so that they might find a new walk of life. In the Brahmacharya School and boarding house of his (practice of abstinence from all wordly pleasures and preparing to join an order of hermits) ashram (hermitage) he told the students to be well equipped. and they were treated with mother's affection and father's stern resolution. We can be enlightened from his writings that from time to time he left written records which would direct the students to the right path.

In the days of yore when the students would stay in the house of Guru (Preceptor), they practised stern austerities. With this object in view in 1923, Acharyadev founded a school at Madaripur naming 'Brahmacharya Vidyalaya'. In the same year, by the financial aid of benevolent Kumar Hemendra Kumar Ray of Dighapatia, 'Rajshahi Students' Home' was set up. In 1925 Brahmacharya School was also established in Khulna. During the years 1920-1926 Acharyadev succeeded in undertaking relief works on the Pitripaksha (the dark fortnight immediately preceding the light fortnight of the months of Aswin, the sixth month in the Bengali Calender) Fair at Gaya and the Annakut (a stupendous heap of boiled rice) Fair at Banaras, inaugurated the branches of the Sangha, and bore the brunt of the entire relief service for the flood-striken people of Midnapore in West Bengal and Orissa's Puri Branch came to existence at this time with smooth performance of relief works on the blessed occasion of the Car Festival of Lord Jagannath.

In 1926 when the office of the Sangha was located at

the Cornwallis street in Calcutta, he founded 'Sangha Sevak Sammilani'—a Society of the supporters remaining faithful and sticking fast to the Sangha—with aim of improving the moral code of the students. The Acharya used to advise the students, gathering of youths particularly, with interesting topics on formation of character and life-building, self-control, self discipline and continency. Enamoured and enthralled, many of them optioned their services in various spheres directed by the Divine Master, while the rest of these youths led their lives as Ashramites for years long, some of them sacrificing themselves at the altar of renunciation in the time to come and got initiated into Sannyas. But all carried on the noble services of the Sangha in this or that way.

At Madaripur Brahmacharya School Dhirendra Nath Sankhari was a student He wrote that Pranavanandaji was known as 'Swamiji Maharaj' to the Ashramites ; he held hurricane lantern before them one day and said, "So long this hurricane lantern contains oil, it burns and as soon as the oil is exhausted, the lamp stops giving light. And the same if we crave for and live a life of sensual pleasures or luxury or lose the spirit of Brahmacharya, we lose everything and perish at last. Beware, sensual and lustful fellows die untimely. Don't associate with morally backward people, don't mix with them. If you associate with them, you'll cut your throat with your own knife."

At Bajitpur, with a rose in hand, he told Dhirendranath, "Look at this beautiful flower. But had the worms ruined its youth, the flower would have been destroyed. Bear in mind, the period from 15th to 25th year is the training ground of a man and if during this

period you don't practise Brahmacharya, you will get ruined."[1] Dhirendranath also wrote that the Acharya would advise the students about the practise to be followed in taking food, sleep and self-restraint, and directed them to continue physical exercises for observance of Brahmacharya. He would keep a keen eye about what quantity of food the students were continuing to take and if he found them taking small quantity, he used to scold them severely. In this context the account left by Swami Atmanandaji will be very much relevant: Keeping a roll of plaintain before them Acharyadev once told his monk-disciples that if they had any greed, they would lose strength. One day at Calcutta Ashram at about 10 a.m. a devotee came with a first-class bunch of Martaman plaintains (a variety of banana originally grown in Martaban) and placed it before the feet of the acharya. Swamiji Maharaj smiling mildly kept the same in a corner of the room, then said to the person, "Is it your home grown'? The reply was, "Yes, my Lord, I have brought the first roll for you." After two or three days the bananas got ripe and mostly all the residents of the Ashram were present. An old ascetic brought two nice plaintains and uncasing them placed them in the milk-pot of Swamiji, he took small quantity of it and distributed the residue to all present. One man was found going towards the roll of plaintains. Acharyadev stopped him. The loyal ascetic murmured—"Such nice plaintains are being decomposed. Swamiji neither took them nor distributed them. I have got to throw them away because the man who brought this bunch had deprived his children of the taste of the same."

At night, after the meal was taken, the disciples were seated before him to hear his counsels. Pointing out

the bunch Acharyadev said, 'Look to the condition of the plaintains. The fruits that were beautiful in colour, scent and beauty now look deplorable. See, how they have been decomposed with the passage of time. And in this way, you should remember that time is ever fleeting. Had I distributed these plaintains to you all, it would have satisfied your tongue for a time and took you all to contented state which is very difficult to forsake. But gratification of enjoyment of that savour was for a very short time and recollection of that remembrance would have kept you away from conscience and stoicism, philosophical or methaphysical awakening of the spirit of renunciation. I therefore did not distribute the plaintains amongst you."[2].

It was he who founded the ideals of ancient Brahmacharyashram (the first stage of life up to the age of 16 years according to the Vedic Hindus when one has to practise Brahmacharya) before all and they were guided to the right path, and the guidance was given by Acharyadev. Whenever, they faced frustration, he used to give them counsels which kept them, emboldened them and added to their impetus for all time to come. He responded in an epistle to a student of B.A. Class of Rajshahi College later known as Swami Krishnananda, "Today India is passing through a movement which may be called universal unification and universal salvation and as such we have to be united, we have to practise dedication, restraint, truth and have to embrace them as the ideals of life." He advised a young Brahmachari, : "You have to become self-controlled, practise sacrifice, truth and regard Brahmacharya as the proper path to be adopted during youth. You have to be a burning effigy of dedication

seated on the sacred seat of the Aryan Sages. You have to resurrect your country, your nation. You are born to perform this noble task. Get ready and collect proper prowess. You are all lion's cubs with elephant's strength in mind. The future of India is the future of Indian youths. You are to play a rigid role in that cause and as such it is the first step to enliven society."

He wrote to another young Brahmachari "Ye are the loving children of ambrosial spirit, do not get perturbed under any circumstances since you have unlimited prowess and virility, unfailing force and unceasing vigour within you- Ye are holy and pristine by yourselves, you should not dread anything. Is there any evil that can ruin you ? Be steady and forbearing, composed and full of Self-conviction, strive for manifestation of the strength that lies within. Ye are the sons of heroic nation, you should have no weakness."

He instructed another such youth : "Do your job, your assigned onus with iron will and firm resolution. Give up and shun fever and fret, frivolity and trifling, purposelessness and inconstant trend of the mind. Be true to your ideals intact with fortitude and forbearance and march onward equipped with the conviction of performing your assigned duties. Success will be yours."

The youths of the country have to play a very significant role in nation-building. With a view to performing this arduous, Herculean task of nation-building, Acharyadev stepped forward first in building up the character of the youths on the basis of the ideals of moral movements, of continence and control of the self, and to bring the matter to the limelight, to propagate this universal truth, he directed the Ashramites

and Sangha-followers to publish the well-known Bengali journal in the name 'Pranav' and showered his blessings upon them. Dissemination of the aims and ideals of the Sangha along with the apothegms of Acharyadev thus came to the knowledge of the Sangha-lovers, votaries and the public as well. 'Pranav' for the first few years was a quarterly organ of the Mission. It has been published and in circulation monthly and regularly since 1342 B.S. upto date. The ideas, principles and the system or method of arduous ascetic practices of the Ancient Sages as cherished by the Acharya came out in letters of print in literature in the form of book named 'Dhruva Bharata' which aroused commotion in and brought adoration from the public, the gentry and the low alike. Literatures in the form of book-lets and pamphlets dwelling on the life-making thoughts and standards of perfection and high-lighting the assuming, commanding portrait of Swamiji Maharaj was also brought out in many an Indian language and ventilated all over the land for enabling and ennobling the multitude strive for moral and spiritual elevation.

In the year 1926 the 'Sangha Sevak Sammilani', an association of the Sangha-adherents, a volunteers' group, was formed in Calcutta. Leaf-lets were distributed, posters were pasted on the walls for drawing the attention of the youths in schools, colleges, hostels, dwelling houses and streets. This created tremendous commotion and on Sundays' meetings of the Association great number of students including teachers and professors thronged the Ashram. Right from the Acharya's room down to the footpath the people thronged and waited to have 'Darshana' (interveiw) of Swamiji Maharaj and

to receive spiritual inspiration and teachings from him. They had to wait hours together to reach him one by one. To afford them some sort of relief Swamiji would come there at 3 A.M. at dawn and sit there till 11 A.M. Then he used to come again in the afternoon and delivered his teaching & blessings till at night.

He wrote to an anonymous devotee in 1927 :

"Should you act up to my counsel, no weakness or timidity can do you any harm, Get ready for mingling your being as well as personality with that of the Sangha, since you are in the Sangha and the Sangha is in you."

• DISSEMINATION OF THESE VIGOROUS MORAL AND SPITIRUAL MOVEMENTS ALL OVER THE LAND.

Roaming from one province to another Swamiji preached his teachings. Even domestic people came en mass to him and they were told that there was no need for leaving family and estrangement from dear and near ones by going to the forest for purification of their souls. From domestic people to stalwarts in the sphere of education and culture his advice was as quoted in Swami Vedananda's 'Garhastam' and approved by Guruji Maharaj—

> "Stick to your own religion and cultural heritage. Whatever you think till morning, do it in the name of Goddess Durga, the mother of the universe. Worship the mother for her satisfaction, dive deep in meditation. Regardless of self-interest, give everything you have before the feet of the Eternal and that is and should be the aim and creed of life. You must

have duty to regard everything as mere ephemeral things and live here, on earth, life a fish that moves about the water without any mud in its body."

Devising a clear cut-formula, a practical, straight way, he used to say,

"There is no Dharma or religion in garland or bags ; it does not remain in holy dots or marks on the forehead. Religion is neither prevalent in the Purans, the Koran, nor in this or that diet or garment, nor in temple, mosque or Cathedral either. Dharma can only be had in renunciation, self-control, truth and sense-restraint. Dharma remains in attitude, conduct, performance and realisation."

THE OMNISCIENT AND THE SUPER-HUMAN: CERTAIN MEMORABLE EPISODES

The Omniscient and the Super-human Sangha-Lord in mortal frame fought shy of manifesting his super-human, super-natural powers, though the Sangha-monks, devotees and the followers now and then experienced such sorts of events as would easily make them aware of his omniscience and fore-thought of their wishes. We have gone through their writings and learnt how the Acharya put the soil of their hearts to acid test and bestowed suitable spiritual or material gifts to each of them.

Even as a Brahmachari Binode impersonated the ideal of dedicated service to the distressed humanity. A reliever of the sick, rescuer of the down-trodden and champion of the helpless, he took inhuman straip and

pain to ramify the gamut of his selfless service in branches and sub-branches through his Bharat Sevashram Sangha throughout the land. When he was almost lost in relief work all over East Bengal in 1921 and especially in the interior rural areas, he very often would visit the village centres for treatment of the occasionally ailing volunteers. It so happened that one day, during such a visit when he felt half-conscious on account of severe type of very high fever, he was taken to Ashasuni Centre. One of his Brahmachari followers was at a loss and doubted whether a highly advanced good souled man of religiosity ought to fall seriously ill and suffer from ache and pain—then, what sort of spiritual personality he was. As Brahmachari Binode, a Saint-preceptor-Saviour like Shankara, Buddha and Chaitanya was all-seeing and could easily read other's mind, he recovered his calm and stillness and after a profound pause of nearly ten or twelve minutes, cast his gentle look at the suspicious worker uttering "Shankara, Buddha and Chaitanya too had to suffer from such sorts of illness."[3]

On another occasion the revolutionaries for whom his love was boundless and who looked upon him as a friend of theirs got the proof of his transparent mental horizon to them when one of their leaders Amarendra Chatterjee was seized with anguishing suspicion that his young followers might get diverted from the line of revolutionary freedom movement; he accused the Acharya who inspiringly supported their patriotic fervour and considered it to be religious nationalism. He clarified smilingly that he remained the same Brahmachari Binode as before. But he could not expect the rudderless ships, the selfish and impotent youngsters

giving their blood for the motherland, he intended to instil in them physical and mental virility and strength, burning and heroic patriotism, iron resolve to court death at the cost of self-dedication ; he wanted to build up their lives on the basis of self-discipline ; and then and then only they could be fit for proving their worth as warriors of national movement. Amarendra got passified and begged to be excused for his misunderstanding the Acharya.[4]

Acharyadev once advised the persecuted Hindus to prosecute and punish the neighbouring Muslims, the miscreants. But the timid, pacifist Hindus were in a fix as to who would bell the cat and take other consequent troubles by defraying the expenses of a suit. At their entreaty for mediating in and settling the matter he wanted to know from the Muslims what steps they were going to adopt in view of the fact that their neighbouring Hindus were on the point of levelling the said allegation and filing a suit against them. One of their representatives replied that they were collectively prepared to face any consequence for which a good amount of funds had been raised from amongst their sects and they would not hesitate a bit to collect more as and when needed. In response to his query as to the identity of the real miscreants and the reasons for their defending them, they frankly confessed their collective responsidility. As the Acharya finally requested them to allow the culprits proper punishment, since he treated both the Hindu and Muslim communities equally and wished to see the ruffians punished, the Muslims asserted that these kinsmen of theirs could not be left in the lurch despite their offences. Acharyadev realising the situation pregnant with the naked truth that the Hindus

were oppressed and persecuted everywhere because of their disunities and frailties on the one hand and the difference between the two communities on the other, resolved to integrate the Hindus everywhere through organisation without delay, to avoid inviting greater catastrophe.[5] He poured down his unflagging energy in bringing out unity amongst the Hindus upon the activities of his Sangha.

Swami Vedananda acquaints us with many such an occasion on which visitors were astonished and struck dumb seeing the All-Seeing Prophet manifest his extra-mundane, transcendental power willy-nilly, almost against his accord, only for removal of their afflications.[6] On one such occasion a devotee who, when instructed by some one else to repeat some holy hymns of prayer, smilingly said that despite doing so for several hours at a stretch he had not received the desired result. Swamiji could easily visualise with his prophetic vision that the man had not been initiated by a real spiritual preceptor. He advised the man to continue his order for a week and then throw away in the Ganges the hymns writing the same on a marmelos leaf. The gentleman got ashamed of his distrust and suspicion very shortly, as his carrying out the Acharya's instruction brought the cherished fruit longed for.

Another confirmed sceptic in spirituality and spiritual possibility, who received initiatory 'Mantra' of prayer from Acharyadev and was directed to repeat sometime daily with observance of certain rigid restrictions in diet binding on him, decided to defy the command and indulged in taking chicken curry and rich and spicy food to appease his sensitive tongue by frequenting restaurant and cafe corners as a conse-

quence of which he was laid down with disease of serious type and tried to recover under medical treatment in various ways, but with no effect. Feeling extremely remorseful he started repeating the said 'Mantra' sincerely in obedience to the Acharya's instruction in no time. To his utter surprise, one fine morning he found himself fully cured of his fatal disease within a brief span of time. On many occasions Swamiji Maharaj, reluctant to permit his time to be killed by any suspicious arguer, used to ask him to dive into serene meditation close to the shrine where he was daily worshipped, assuring him (the visitor) of his responding to the latter's queries. On the contrary, he would address the genuine inquisitive souls and aspirants as his beloved children and take off the burden of all the sins perpetrated by the them on their foregone births that they forthwith might be safeguarded under his spiritual, protecting guidance.

Much later, in the year 1933, Swamiji Maharaj was attacked with a septic sore, a furunculous orientalies causing severe pain. Swami Vedananda in this context seeks to point out the direct root of this.[7] "Why did grand spiritual personalities like you fall ill and suffer ?" In response to this question of one of the householder-followers Swamiji made a fitting retort that it was for them.[8] Acharyadev really got overwhelmed with grief on hearing the malancholy cry of an affectionate mother and took to this fatal septic sore or malignant tumour of her laddie. The woman along with his son used to visit the Acharya who, paying no heed to entreaties of his monk-disciples, called her beside him.

We do not care a bit for bringing afflictions to these saint-saviours for recovery of our ailments, though we

wonder to ponder how they have to bear with aching pain and inhuman strain to remedy the diseases of the suffering men and women who fall back upon their shelter and protection in their spiritual benignity. Priyanath Das of Bajitpur rushed in break-neck hurry to the Acharya for his spiritual grace by which his dying son, he believed confidently, would be saved. He fell down at the feet of the great preceptor and prayed for his kind visit to the open courtyard of his house where he had kept his son in a dying state. Acharyadev was obliged to visit the residence of Priyanath, assured the sorrowing members of the Das family of his utmost effort, and asked them to lift the boy and take him inside. At his invigorating touch the boy, who was panting for breath with the last gasp, came back to life from the jaws of death.

Acharyadev once went to visit his devotee house-holders at Purnia in Behar. There his mercy was showered upon Smt. Charubala Devi, wife of Raibahadur Jyotish Chandra Bhattacharya, so that she got completely cured of her malignant sore, a severe type of skin disease called Eczema of twenty years long for recovery of which she had undergone various sorts of medical treatment without any effect. Her sufferings, the Acharya realised, were not hers, they were owing to the sins of her previous births which she unburdened to Acharyadev at his direction. She took refuge in his spiritul grace and mysteriously recovered. He whose unlimited love and benignancy swelled up and flowed onward like waves coming in a heavy rush to protect the dejected, distressed ailing refugees would obviously be acclaimed as the World-Teacher and Saint-Saviour.

Men and women came to Swamiji Maharaj during his stay in Ranchi for sometime in Behar with the anticipation of getting answers to their queries. One day a Brahmo visitor expressed his doubt about idolatry, chastising worship of the designed images of God (who is one and indivisible) as foolish and a great scar on Hinduism ; he wondered how being a staunch advocate of the idea of oneness and immutability of God the Absolute, Acharya Shankara could write and sing songs and hymns in praise of idolatry, of many gods and goddesses. Acharya Swami Pranavananda broke his silence after a while and smilingly admitted veracity of the statement and pronounced that the Absolute can be formless and at the same time He is capable of assuming the form of an image, because it is His omnipotence that makes impossible possible and that it is no good circumscribing Him within formless attributes. The respectable Brahmo gentlemen without uttering a single word submitted to the Acharya prostrating, and while taking leave of him murmured that the interrogation which had so long visited his thoughts frequently is now assured by this Acharya who, he was disillusioned, must indeed be a magnanimous Seer.[10]

Swamiji Maharaj, while visiting Jessore in East Bengal, had to face and shower his untold blessings on the crowd of visitors. Once, invited by one of his monk-followers, members of the local Bar Association came to have his blessings. An arrogant lawyer boasting of his physical might told the ascetic that he believed in the force of muscles instead of spirituality and that he was curious of getting proof of Acharyadev's demonstration of the same. The ascetic-mendicant rebuffed mildly that being a modest, abased follower of

Swamiji Maharaj he also could show him a little of the muscle-power. The impudent man then proposed for having a sharp struggle and all on a sudden caught hold of the ascetic's palm ; the ascetic-disciple of the Acharya simply pressed hard the palm of the legal practitioner and threw him instantly away that caused injury and ache to that veritable humbug who, however, did not hesitate to meet the Great seer and have his spiritual counsels.[11]

A Lecturer serving in Hazaribagh College in Behar came to have a view of Swami Maharaj with his scholarly collegues and companions. They could not help protesting against the prolonged course of entrance into the small room for interview with Swamiji. They wanted to go in collectively all at once. However, having got information of the rigid system of admittance, they did not like to violate the system except one of them who forcibly went in impudently. But the self-conceited gentleman stood motionless and still in utter amazement at the unprecedented sight of the great spiritual Master who was sitting calm and composed with his countenance radiating a divine lustre and his massive statue-like stature surrounded by a luminous halo suggesting to his mind his divinity and untold love for mankind. The gentleman was beside himself with awe and reverence, wonder and admiration ; he touched the blood-red feet of the Acharya in modesty and devotion, shedding tears silently and was blessed with favour. He came with his wife the next day for initiation[12]. To quote Oliver Goldsmith, the great English poet, "Those who came to scoff at remained to pray".

Same was the case with a political leader and minister Babu Sri Ram Prakash at Hazaribagh, who

was highly influential and possessed with affluence and power. He always maintained the haughty air of a veritable know-all and had no regard for religious monks or preceptors. He started planning with his wicked associates how to teach the Bengalee Hindu Saint a good lesson. Swamiji was then residing at his temporary lodge in front of Babu Ram Prakash's big palace. It so happened that one morning a Sangha-ascetic stepped in that palace to take Ram Prakashji to the Acharya as directed. Prakashji first wanted to turn the monk out uttering a menacing shout, but the sober, suave conduct and soft words of the latter pacified him. Reluctantly he came, stood before the threshold of the closet with an arrogant air of derision, but as he saw the luminous, sublime figure of the Acharya in a sitting posture, lost in meditation but shining with unearthly glow, he thought he was having a 'Darshan' (act of seeing to pay homage to) of Lord Shiva. He at first stood awe-mute and wonder-stuck for a while. Awakened as if from his trance he did lie straight and bow down on the lotus-like feet with tears rolling down his checks. Acharyadev blessed him with a smile and told him to turn up at the succeeding dawn after bath with five myrobalans. Ram Prakashji came the next day at dawn and was duly initiated by the Sangha-Lord.

Taking all these episodes and situations into account we have had a glimpse of the celestial and omniscient personality who with his Divine magnetic force could so easily impress and draw the aspiring souls towards himself, treating them all as his favourite children and ennobling them with the dynamic condescending touch of his super-human powers.

THE WORLD-TEACHER AS A VOTARY OF SHAKTI OR THE GODDESS OF STRENGTH

Great Seers and Messiahs incarnate themselves from time to time to fulfil the universal mission and Providential will and remain in their mortal forms unless and until they strive to seek, to find and not to give way to extinction for the attainment of their desired ideal. If, perchance, their untiring energy flags momentarily, they are enlivened with heart or hope to retain the same in them. We have come to know from Swami Vikashananda[13] that Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavananda, the epochmaking seer and saint-Saviour, desired in the like manner to retain his mortal shape during the days of Durga Puja (Worship of Goddess Durga or the Female Parent) by the fag end of 1927 when he was suffering from serious ailment because of extremely untiring, irregular physical and mental exertion, when regulated medical treatment proved futile, when an ardent devotee implored for his recovery with flower offerings taken by him after the ablation to Goddess Durga From Her Feet. And then, with the longing for remaining alive, the Acharya completely regained his former prowess and came round. This phenomenon inspired him with promptitude to promulgate that he would organise worship of Goddess Durga in Banaras the next year.

To re-install and revive the ancient Vedic ideals in accord with the go of modern life and civilisation and gain energy and strength from the Supreme was the Mission of the Sangha-Lord for which he was on the go to glorify Religion and Culture with a view to guiding and transfusing the debased timid nation for years infinite to come, with intrinsic might and uncea-

sing vivacity, thereby making the moribund Hindus volatile and invincible. Shakti as the Soul of the Providence, he believed, is Cosmic Energy and Evolution through which the universe evolves with the spirit of Nationality in our life. The real import of worship of the Divine Mother he sought in the realised truth of saints and devotees, seers and sages, in their innate spiritual experiences. We, the Hindus, worship the Mother as Jagaddhatri, or Kalee, or Durga, or Bhabani, or Chandi. Shivaji, the great Maratha and Hindu nation-builder, Bhabananda and Satyananda in Bankim Chandra's celebrated novel 'Anandamath' and Sitaram in his historical novel of the same name, Sri Aurobindo in his post-revolutionary life, Saint Kamalakanta, Sri Sri Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar—all worshipped Durga or Kalee or Bhabani or Bhabatarini. This Divine Female Parent stands for the National spirit of India. And it is through our religion, our history or literature, philosophy or architecture, sculpture, art and acesthetics that we manifest the very life and love of our nation, the soul of the Mother, in an organised manner.

To Swami Pranavananda too the land we live in symbolises as much the Divine Motherhood as our own mothers or mothers of our children are, we definitely being the children. And he aimed at organically relating this to our highest concept of Humanity. Our thought holds aloft this Humanity as Narayana or Mahavishnu or Mahadeva (Shiva), an emanation of the Absolute. The Mother on the lap of Narayana or Mahavishnu, i.e. the Nation resting for good in Humanity, or standing on Shiva or the good, or killing Asura (the Demon) and completely bringing the brute force under restraint—all these forms of Shakti and her cult

represent the cult of Nationality as of Humanity. It is for this fundamental, intrinsic universalism that Acharyadev deemed Shakti-Sadhana or cult of power as a very significant and unavoidable part of our highest and noblest spiritual symbolism and culture. In view of the national debasement and devitalisation prevailing all around, Acharyadev launched a revolutionary movement for publicising Cult of Shakti or Worship of Power amongst his countrymen, thereby arousing them with prowess and vigour, manhood and manliness lying dormant in them in accordance with their national and universal spiritual attitude to and concept of life.

Swami Vivekananda, we know, did sigh for seeing the hungry, starved millions properly fed first and masculinity and virility next, which made him burst into emotional and grievous utterance :

> "Set aside the Geeta and play football and take hard physical exercise, then and then only you will understand the import of the Vedanta."

The Sangha-Lord Swami Pranavananda, we have said above, on visualising the national depravation to the extreme also commented that the ailing, meek nation should be given blood transfusion first and then should be revived with strength and vigour. He exhorted accordingly to keep off discourse of the Upanishad for some time and embolden the nation with the Cult of Prowess. That is why worship of Goddess Durga or the very popular religio-national ceremony was organised in Banaras, the prime sacred place of India, the illustrious shrine of dwelling of Lord Shiva, the refuge of all and the resort of Kalee and of Mother Durga and Annapurna, the Feeder of the Universe. The Acharya directed ten propagating

teams of Sangha-monks, Brahmacharies and workers to invite all city-dwellers to assemble at the Puja pandel and make every necessary provision for illumination of the streets with ochre-colour clothes of the ascetics. The festival was celebrated for three days in a befitting manner, which stirred the public to their depths with great elation and spiritual awakening. Banaras reverberated for days and nights with ceaseless chanting in praise of the Divine Mother, devotional songs, adoration and distribution of 'Prasad (food-offering to the deity taken after the sacrifice).

Since the First observance of Durga Worship festival in Banaras in October, 1928, by the Sangha in the precincts of Kaleebari (Royal Kalee palace) of the King of Cooch-Behar of North Bengal on the Sonarpura Road at Bangalee Tola, a local neighbourhood,[14] it has been regularly held as a yearly programme of the Organisation ; item of Hinduism and mammoth religio-socio-cultural conferences have added gravity and variety to the said programme along with demonstration of mock fights by the Rakshidal or village militia as an inseparable part of the Sangha's nation-building activities.

Arati or act of greeting the Divine Mother by monks waving lamp, fan, trident and other weapons with their hands before her face has also been a regular programme of the Sangha since then. Leaders and persons of erudition and intellect were invited to participate in the conferences to deliver speeches for the purpose of bringing home to the assemblage the Cult of Power, ideal of nation-building and spirit of national integrity and unification.

To the Sangha-lovers and supporters the real object of the aforesaid celebration was manifested in course of time in the year 1935 when Swamiji Maharaj came to the limelight with the massive programme to put in working order the Hindu Samanvay (the Hindu Society Unification) movement.

Acharyadev initiated worship of Kalee or Chamunda, Divine Mother as well as Destroyer of the persecutors and evil-doers, in his Divine Mission, invoked and adored her for safeguarding the nation against peril and turmoil, disintegration and disruption arising out of the imbroglio of that period in 1345 B.S.[15] The very purpose of the worship, he believed, would come into fruition if the worshippers of Chamunda or Kalee or Ranachandi, the War Goddess, could fight dauntless to extirpate depravity, relentless or unjust use of power, motivated exploitation, deceiving and other accompanying evils. Worship of Guru or the Sangha- Lord, be it mentioned in this connection, was duly celebrated in the ground floor of the Sangha-Branch of Banaras attended by large number of devotees and pious men and women with devotional songs and Kirtan-dances before the Acharya seated in his altar calm and composed, delved deep in spiritual trance simultaneously with observance and celebration of worship of Durga in the spacious hall upstairs. The religious conference held on the Devotional propitiation ceremony of the Universal Mother Durga was adored by Acharyadev sitting on a huge erected platform with images of Sri Rama Chandra, the annihilator of Ravana and his devilish accomplices with bow and sheath carrying arrows,—Lord Krishna, the killer of the demoniac

oppressor Kansa with the wheel as well as the Chief Architect of triumph in the Battle of Kurukshetra, and Lord Shiva holding the trident aloft and ruining the great religious feast held by King Daksha, father of Shiva's wife Sati, killing the mischievous Despot and destroying the outrageous demon Tripura, The Acharya with his pattern of excellent worth and non-stop flawless activities was a perfect prototype of the distinctive traits of these three gods and he would sit in the same manner with trident and rod in hand against the background of a group of monks armed with swords, He also carried on heroic crusade against the forces of evil and anarchist oppression, exploitation and extreme violence, actuated by the divine mission of installing the empire of truth, equity and justice. He sang the chant of glory—the glory of strength, manhood and manliness for glorification of the Hindus and the Nation as well, pursuing the Puranic gods and goddesses, the National heroes and heroines, the apostles and nation-builders with firm resolve, undaunted physical and moral prowess, unfailing spirit of sacrifice, penetrating and all-seeing vision of the Indian saviours and seers, savants and sages of the old.

We must not lose sight of the fact that during these days of festivity the Great Seer and Saint-Saviour Acharya Swami Pranavananda, in whom piety and munificence incarnated, was surrounded by his votaries and dedicated adovocates, lacs of Sangha-lovers and devout people, and showered untold benison on all appeasing their hunger or craving, like that of the Divine Mother's affectionate care and concern. And they were gratified enough by his verdant look and tenderly touching lustre.[16]

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VII

PRECEPTORSHIP OR MASTERDOM : ITS INVESTITURE & VARNASHRAM

We are at peace only when we love and adore or by loving and adoring our most beloved-revered guide, parents, friends and fellow-beings we can love and adore ourselves. And the only scientific, practical way to bring about this peace is to resort to a well-adjusted personality to love and follow him. Psychologists contend that the man or person whose complexes have not been organised in an ardent urge to serve his or her superiors connot be counted sane. So every one without attachment to a living guide is more or less insane. For controlling allegiance to their ideals and from their arduous efforts to serve the environment in the interest of others, they, according to these psychologists, developed a balanced life, a growing character, a knowledge full and blooming. They came to be the heirs of love and peace, and thus they came to be the normal guides of man. They ought to be called Prophets, Masters or Gurus.

● GLORIFICATION OF GURU-WORSHIP & VARNASHRAM

The denomination 'GURU' means divine father or mother. In one receptacle he is the friend, intimate, embodiment of knowledge, spiritual treasure and all. It also applies to those through whose entire instrumentality the mind is grounded in truth and weaned from falsehood. The foundation of Indo-Aryan Culture being 'Guru', it is the talking of a normal man as guide,

the surrender of one's ego to him who nurtures to existence by forming one's character. Active love for an embodiment of love was thought a normal existence. Initiation into such a life by acceptance of a spiritual master called one's second birth, for the real unfolding of intrinsic faculties, began right then and there. It may appear a queer, impractical way of education, but even science besides religiosity, the highest good of Indian National life, will support it and history will lend it proof. All those who would reform the world to-day cannot divert their eyes from this most ancient path, the vital power-house of ceaseless divine energy linked up with the whole nation, of forming man.

The magi—the wise, erudite, introspective sages as spiritual masters of ancient India, recommended to surrender reverence to every youth. Just when the intellect is budding, the youth is taken before the traditional fire. Vows, are made, and the sacred thread is given. From then his dedication to the ideal commences. And from that dedication evolves discipline. Attainment or realisation of education without initiation and adherence is vain.

Life has an abundant variety. Though nothing should be dealt with as a thing apart, neither can it be treated as it were something else. Seemingly infinite varieties exist in human beings. No two are just alike. They are born with different shapes, instincts, temperaments, different qualities of norms etc. None can be a substitute for another ; there are no duplicates. The aim of social service is the right use of every man in his proper place. This objective achieved by ancient India in a social system is what is called Varnashrama.

By grouping men of similar instincts it was discovered that human society naturally fell into four great classes, mutually beneficial to each other. They are the four dynamic wheels on which the social locomotive moves and functions. Ideal itself, the love that links all life, is its railway track. These four major classes are the protecting or provisioning proletarian, or the leader, the soldier, the merchant and the workman ; or, to carry out the rail-road picture the engineer, the guard, the conductor and the stoker. Every socio-religious fabric—national, domestic, animal, divine, classless—each one indeed has the four main types, and where they have a sanction in thought or law, they have a chance to breathe and benefit each other in close company of their masters. Developed skills and traits are passed from one generation to the next by both inheritance and environment, semen and example. And thus a pride to carry out and fulfil one's parent's or godfather's traits blossoms in the young and juvenile learners. Just as the Guru brings peace in the individual, so Varnashram does in the society.

Guru and Varnashram are therefore the key to peace and stability. They are the laws and orders of life as India once saw them, and hence they have a providential force. Even today they can contribute to the mighty uphill task of reformation. But they bring the ways to preservation. We cannot afford delay, for most certainly most of our schemes for peace are made for a concocted peace, a lifeless monentary flash of light and a single surety to imminent explosion. An eagerness for peace and socio-relgio-cultural stability of the whole nation and beyond the nation was welling up in the hearts of stalwart Gurus or Guides like Sri Sri Rama-

Krishna, Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda and Acharya Swami Pranavananda which inspires us even today. If all devotees of peace and national solidarity are enkindled to win an integration in themselves, to mould themselves and others in accordance with the enlightenment of Indo-Aryan culture and these religious preceptors of Realisation of the twentieth century to accept the genuine Guru and Varnashram, they are to take such a Guru for themselves to lay bare their inmost thoughts, their love and reverence for him and thereby recover their peace and noble heritage and pull with dedicated service their environing milieu towards its cherished goal.

The sweeping introspective, initiative vision of Swami Pranavananda enabled him to visualise the wretched condition of the society and the nation. It was not at all hard for him to realise that discords and disunities, inequity and hypocrisy ; unfair play and hatred had been so active to reduce the homogeneous people of the past into innumerable heterogeneous factions. To find way out of the riddle he resolved to install himself in the position of the Spiritual Preceptor and concentrated the irrational and mutually warring masses round his superhuman magnetism, thus having the path for a massive socio-national movement for reconstruction, subsequently to be set afloat by him.[1]. Each and every juvenile, young Aryan, from a royal prince to an ordinary peasant, during those palmy days of Hinduism in the Vedic age would have to lead a life of plain living and high thinking amid calm, serene natural surrounding in the hermitage or Ashram of the spiritual master in whom he saw the mild yoke of a caressing father and the untold affection of universal motherhood

—to build up his life and character as per the Master's instruction and supervision. The disciples thus underwent physical, mental, moral and spiritual discipline for self-development, in unfailing unconditional submission to their Master who transmitted through the channel of his erudition and wisdom his power to inflame the devoted aspirants. Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavananda was intently keen on transmitting into his young devotees and votaries his own heavenly attributes to promote their promising sprituality with paternal care and filial affection in a suitable atmosphere, looking forward in eager expectation to the desired effect.

Swamiji Maharaj manifested himself as the God-ordained Seer and Preceptor of the Age to some of his very intimate disciples and followers on the full moon day of November in 1924 and as such he was duly and institutionally worshipped ; since then he has been adored thrice a day in regular order ceremonially by his ascetic-disciples as an incarnation of Lord Shiva, the God of gods.[2] He was looked upon by the young Brahmacharies as their friend, philosopher and guide—as one of theirs. We have seen erstwhile in our dissertation how, thenceforward, he exerted his utmost to institute his Divine Mission the Bharat Sevashram Sangha on a solid, stable structure maintaining inward and outward discipline and organise a movement for restoration and reinstatement of this sanatan (eternal, Catholic) 'Gurudom' in a most extensive, national scale to let the masses as a whole link themselves up wiih and derive inpetus from his celestial captivating personality. He strove and did shoulder the Herculean onus of reinstating the ideals of Vedism to found the Mission

as well as reorient the nation on the basis of restituting the ancient ideals and systems already spoken of.

We are fortunate enough to see the Sangha-Lord making his maiden appearance as the divinely inspired World-Teacher. Ceremonial adoration of him as Guru started in full swing within the Sangha premises and everywhere wiihout, three times daily amongst the masses in a befitting manner with the pomp and splendour as he willed—he who had commanded to observe worship and appeasement of the Spiritual Preceptor as public instructions of our growing magnitude. Besides, organisation of occasional socio-religio-cultural functions and national festivities, the Sangha at Calcutta and its branches and sub-branches all over India began to bring out and publicise journals of various kinds in this regard. The Acharya would grace the yearly and occasional religio-cultural gatherings of multitudes of aspirants irrespective of rank and file of our society in sacred places like Hardwar, Prayag, Banaras, Gaya, Puri etc. with his august presence and transmit his divine blessings, touching one's head with affection and benignness.

But the Prophet of the Age had to face adverse criticism of a few influential persons who foolishly questioned him with scorn and contempt why he being haunted by the ghost of preceptorship[3] was worshipped by offerings or ablations from thousands of Sangha-monks and devotees throwing waters of the holy river on his feet. They were astonished enough to see him worshipped with chanting of a particular Vedic hymn with which the symbol of God Narayana or Vishnu viz. Shalagramashila is worshipped by the pious Hindus. Was he off his head, since it was he who

made provision for Guru-worship and placed his feet on Shalagramshila, a round piece of stone engraved with propitious marks standing for the omniscient Deity? These propagandists even went to the disgraceful length of raising a scandal that the Acharya had wounded the religious sentiments of the typical Hindus whom he had offended not only by sanctioning the practice of Guru-Worship by the ascetics and devotees but also by commanding the fruits, sweets, flowers etc. touched by his feet for distribution among the populace.[4] Acharyadev retorted with due gravity and calm and a mysterious sober smile on his lips that he liked to restore the idea of one's awareness of responsibility and ideal of the glorious past in view of the existing state of a society devoid of sympathy, charity, gracefulness and social service, reverence and duty towards the parents and teachers, fraternity, bond of affection and devotion attachment between the wife and the husband. He added, such a society where anarchy caused by indiscipline and dis-order, self-indulgence and immorality, perversion and self-centredness reign supreme, is like a helmless ship. And with this end in view, he introduced the system of Guru-worship. He asserted, this was also a movement set in motion by him to embellish society with filial piety, the teacher's affectionate dealing with the taught, mutual friendly and conjugal understanding, fraternity, humility and obedience between father and son, master and servant, husband and wife, leader and the multitude—in a word, order, morality and sense of responsibility all over the society. This movement of Gurudom, he further said, would eradicate the accursed bondage of subjugation and apish imitation, distrust and carnality, blunt selfishness and other age-long vices and superstitions. Puzzled and offended by

the criticising, hostile scandal-mongers, the party of visitors from Khulna listening speechless to the irrefutably incontrovertible arguments in support of Guru-Worship for the welfare of the Society and the nation, were highly moved to the depths, their dissatisfaction and disdainful, opposing attitude converted into respect and veneration : they submitted to him and took leave with this emotional utterance that this system with a noble mission of service ought to be performed publicly without restricting it to the jurisdiction of a limited persons. Not by innovating but by renovating the ancient system of preceptorship, Acharyadev conquered the hearts of the multitudes who still retained their inherent naivety of faith to Incarnation of the Supreme.

Acharyadev seated on an elevated dias under a fine upper covering against a variagated setting adorned with a massive idol of Lord Shiva, the destructor of all omens and evils on one end, that of God Srikrishna the annihilator of demons along with the profligate Kshattraiyas and the founder of a vast Spiritual Empire on another end holding the celestial disc-weapon of Sudarshan Chakra in his right hand, in the middle with another image of Sri Rama Chandra the extirpator of the wicked, vicious demon-emperor of Lanka (now Ceylon) Ravana and his dynasty. Waves of visitors keen on having his 'Darshan' (act of seeing to pay homage) and heavenly grace were overwhelmed with indescribable feeling of amazing devotion at the sight of his grand statue-like stature with a huge golden trident in hand seated for hours together, radiating a luminous lusture of divination in uncommon, magnanimous serenity.[5]

● THE UNWEARYING DYNAMIC PROPAGANDIST OF MORAL & SPIRITUAL IDEAS AND IDEALS

Other sorts of activities launched by him during this period deserve mention in this connection. The Head Quarters of the Sangha being shifted to a larger house at the Mirzapur Street in Central Calcutta in 1927, the Sangha Sevak Sammilani, an Association of the Sangha-devotees already set up in the former large house at the Cornwallis Street in the year preceding and smoothly functioning under his direct management drew a countless number of students, teachers and intellectuals, particularly young students of the milieu, close to the magnetic personality of Acharyadev vitalising them with the ideals of self-discipline and continency for promotion of their physical and moral potentialities and many of them to partake in the multiplex activities of the Sangha as volunteers, some of them finally initiated into Sannyas or ascetic mendicancy. At this phase Swamiji Maharaj took the initiative in publishing the illustrated Journal 'Pranav', an organ of the Sangha, in regular course to disseminate the ideology and aims of tho Mission and the apothegms pregnant with the summum bonum of human life and culture.

In 1927-28, as we have already come to know, literature-books and pamphlets on 'training in concentration of mental faculties and character-forming' circulated throughout the country and distributed in schools and colleges stirred young learners, teachers and professors to their depths. Crowds of such newly awakened visitors rushed towards the Acharya at his clarion-call to be favoured with the grace of his spiritual force and he would remain fixed in his seat from 3 A.M. to 11 A.M. and again from 3 P.M. to 11 P.M.

daily to instruct and bless each of them, one after another. Craving souls would keep standing in long queue for several hours at a stretch. even under the scorching sun or heavy downpour, to have an opportunity of seeing this Divine Magnate, many of them going back to their pavillions frustrated yet getting prepared to take the proud privilage the next day.

In addition to this, the movement carried on by the preaching parties with delivery of addresses on self-discipline and self-realisation, songs of glorification of our 'Sanatan' (eternal) ideals and exalted lives chanted by Sangha-monks acted as stimulus to generate a yearning for moral excellence in the students' community. Arrangement For distribution of the bulletine on Brahamacharya (abstinence from and abnegation of all wordly pleasures for joining an order of ascetic mendicancy) for absorption of Swamiji's messages with this effect into the mind of the masses including the youngsters geared up spread of swelling waves of intensest emotion all throughout the land.

● ACHARYA AS THE MONARCH OF THE FUTURE KINGDOM ON EARTH

With the passage of time the movement for sowing the seeds of Dharmacharya (Religious Teacher or God-father) and vindicating the effectiveness and upshot of worship of Guru or Spiritual Master in our household and socio-national existence gathered momentum, spreading over some provinces of Northern India from 1929 to 1931 and by February, 1932, as we read in Swami Vedananda's concise invaluable life-sketch of the Prophet of the Age, widened in intensity and mobility on the blessed occasion of the full moon day of Magh, with ceremonious worship and propitiation of the

Acharya who sat on a well adorned shrine, clad in a regal robe in an elevated Divine trance, acknowledged by waves of assemblage as the grand World-Teacher and Saint-Saviour of the Age and of all times.[6] On the next similar occasion in February, 1933, that being the day of his auspicious advent and of his attainment of Divine Realisation, galaxy of votaries had the good fortune and exultation of having a view of him as the prospective Sovereign of Dharma Rajya or the Empire of God under the sun in a state of celestial exaltation seated in attire and a grand manner becoming of his national and universal preceptorship, surrounded by militia of volunteers rending the air with shouts of victorious rapture and falling at his crimson feet in whole-hearted devotional submission.

The far-seeing Epoch-making Seer proclaimed with conviction in his elevated state of Heavenly inspiration that he being the chosen Preceptor and Saviour of the World of the Supreme, no retarding force can either keep him away from his traversing the path of spirituality or stand in his onward march towards victory. Coming down from his Divine trance to the common stratum he assured his ascetic-followers of his best services for amelioration of the sad, pensive cry of mankind and all out socio-national reorientation. And let us take the proud privilege of looking forward to seeing him march ahead and thrive in ever growing success with his untiring, ceaseless activities for the nation and the whole of humanity.

References

1 Adapted from Swami Vedananda's THE PROPHET OF THE AGE, 2nd Edn. Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Cal., pp, 129-30.

2 ibid, 130.

3 Adapted from The DIVINE LIFE-BUILDER SWAMI PRANAVANANDA, published by Swami Vikashananda, 2nd Edn., 1988, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Cal., p. 44.

4 Adapted from Swami Vedananda's THE PROPHET OF THE AGE, 2nd Edn.. Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Cal. ,pp. 131-132.

5 ibid, pp. 215-216.

6 ibid, p. 136.

VIII

REFORMATION OF THE SHRINES AND HOLY PLACES OF INDIA

Having delved deep into complete awareness of the Divine Mission before his Universal mind and the highest illumination of revelation of that realisation of himself as the destined, selected respresentative of the God of gods on the day of full moon in the month of Magh (the 10th month of the year in the Bengali Calendar/Almanac) in 1916, Brahmachari Binode was institutionally elevated to the glorious seat of the Acharya or Preceptor quite befitting his celestially exalted personality. He courted Sannyas or ascetic mendicancy in December, 1923, through performance of scriptural fe'tes and was recognised as Acharya Pranavanandaji. The Brahmacharis initiated by him as monks and his Brahmachari associates, followers and votaries accepted and adored him as the Divine Seer of the Age, recognised him later on as the World-Teacher and Saint-Saviour in 1924 The Acharya devoted himself whole-heartedly to the Himalayan task of nation-building, organising and forming Hindu Milan Mandir (Unity Centre of the Hindus), Rural Militia and multifarious public welfare activities and successive movements towards re-unification and revitalism of the disintegrated, devitalised Hindu and Indian masses through his massive Mission—Bharat Sevashram Sangha. In the year 1924, he undertook 'Tirtha-Sanskar' —Reform or purification of sacred places of India—an unforgettably remarkable programme of socio-cultural-humanitarian work, and laid the foundation of

the hermitage of Gaya. Besides reforming the shrine of Gaya, he performed many a social job assisted actively by his workers of the Sangha, chief of them being eradication of oppression and tyranny of the Pandas (the Brahmin priests acting as guide to the pilgrims at holy places) on the visiting pilgrims in other shrines too.

It was an obligation of the Hindus to perform post-funeral rites of their forefathers at Gaya and that being so, large number of pilgrims from different parts of India visited Gaya throughout the years and the Pandas seized this opportunity to rob them of their belongings and even rendered them pauper. And it reached the saturating point at Gaya. There exists a system to get a certificate, though oral, from the Pandas recommending that the ritual performances have been accomplished with the satisfaction of gods. The pilgrim obviously asks the Panda if he will get proper result of works he has performed. The Panda's response is :

> "If you satisfy me, you definitely get good result ; otherwise, everything will be futile."

And this certificate had to be obtained by sparing everything the pilgrims had ; and even the Pandas used to get handnotes on their getting back home. Years after years vast number of pilgrims had to stand this oppression helplessly. The attention of Acharya Swami Pranavananda was drawn to this matter and he launched a movement to eradicate such oppression of the Pandas from the principal holy places of India, viz. Gaya, Banaras, Prayag (Allahabad), Puri, etc.

Swami Pravananda resolved that sanctification and reformation of the holy places of India should be one

of the conspicuous details in the programme of activities of his Sangha. When he was only 17-18 years old, a young Brahmachari, proceeding to Gorakhpur to his Preceptor Baba Gambhiranathji and at the request of his mother and brother stepped down to Gaya. While returning he halted at Gaya to perform the ceremony of devotional offering viz. 'Pinda Dana' to the deceased ancestors. But no sooner had he alighted at Gaya than there ensued great struggle of the Pandas to get him at their fold. When the Brahmachari objected to such indecency, the Pandas en masse came to attack him. But Brahmachari Benode took such a stern air that they did not dare to molest him any further and on that day Swamiji decided that he would definitely remove this oppression. Sangha's Ashram (hermitage) at Gaya was established as a result of the murder of a female pilgrim. The news that the Panda in whose house the lady took shelter and was murdered, created a tremendous commotion and the 'Bengalee Settlers' Association' ventilated this inhuman event in the press and invited public social organisations to stop this menace and at long last in 1924 Gaya Sevashram Sangha was instituted at a rented house. The Gayali Pandas got frightened at this as that time a movement was launched in Bengal to remove the Mohanta of Tarakeswar (the chief of a temple) from his seat. The Pandas apprehended that similar movement might also crop up at Gaya. It was the view-point of the Sevashram to look after the interest of the pilgrims, to extend co-operation in their difficulties and render whatever service they would require. The Brahmachari appealed to the Pandas to rise to the occasion and create an atmosphere of case and convenience. The Sangha desired that the pilgrims' dread of the

Pandas should be removed. But from the very beginning the Pandas took revengeful attitude and began to oppose the Sangha-workers at every step. Every muscle-force was used But at the same time different news papers flashed this oppression denouncing the action of the Pandas and praising the Sangha's activities and the momentum reached such a position that the Pandas were obliged to come to amicable settlement.

In the year 1924, arrangement was made that the Pandas would accept whatever the pilgrims would give out of their own accord, and that the Pandas would not demand more than that and remain content with whatever they got. For long fourteen years this system continued and the fright of the pilgrims about the Gayali Pandas melted down ; but in 1937, as a sequel to Bengalee-Behari dispute, the Pandas decided that they would not abide by the decision made earlier. They even went to the disgraceful length of declaring that the pilgrims who would take shelter in the Seva-shram Sangha would not be given the help of the priests and that the Pandas would not do their job. A few daring priests who tried to defy this challenging call was tamed by the corporeal force of the mischief-mongers. At this critical time Swami Pranavananda came to Gaya with a train of monks and some of his followers He had a mind to come to a settlement by mutual negotiation and for that he convened a meeting of the Pandas and priests at the Ashram (Hermitage). But the response was poor, very poor. At this Swamiji Maharaj took a stern attitude. He declared that he would send the pilgrims to the wharf of the river Falgu at Gaya to perform their religious rites and that the priest would act on their behalf in the face of threats. He summoned a monk and told him to go with them to

get the work done at any cost. The said priest knowing everything came forward, since man, he thought, is mortal and one day he will die, but to die for a noble cuase makes him immortal. The pilgrims under the leadership of that daring monk and accompanied by the priest came to the Falgu puay. Even the Pandas had declared that anybody coming to the temple of Lord Vishnu or Falgu Ghat (Falgu Wharf) would not be able to return alive. As the Pandas never expected that even at the teeth of such threats the priest and the monk would come with the pilgrims, they shouted, "Priest, go back or else the water of the Falgu river would turn red by your blood." But the priest was fearless. He got the work done, returned peacefully and nobody of the other fold dared to raise any alarm. And then, under the directive and order of the local Sub-Divisional Officer, the pilgrims resorting to the Sangha-Sevashram went on performing their rites under the guidance of the priests and Sangha-ascetics escorted by the police.

The leaders of the land had already announced that keeping away all other activities, had Swami Pranavananda left his single act of purification and reformation of the pilgrimages, his place in the line of Saints, Saviours and Socio-cultural-religious Reformers would not be lowered than it is. Some persons had proposed to Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das during the period of movement against the Mohanta (the abbot) of Tarakeswar Temple to invite Swamiji to bear the brunt of guiding the movement to which Deshbandhu objected and said to them, "This movement of ours being a part of political movement strives to solve a transient problem. But Swamiji's movement aims at preaching

noble religio-socio-cultural ideas and ideals and socio-philanthropic service, which is much wider and more advanced. He should not be disturbed in any way whatsoever."[1]

On coming back to Calcutta, Acharyadev launched a tremendous movement and in every village and town of Bengal meetings used to be held denouncing the oppression of the Gayali Pandas and the news of these meetings had to be focussed in the newspapers of different languages with the result that the number of pilgrims of Gaya became miscroscopic. Pressure was also imposed on the Behar Government to look to the safety and security of life and property of the pilgrims. With public opinion in one hand and decrease in number of pilgrims on the other, the Pandas faced a financial blockade with the result that they got afraid and had no alternative than to accept the regulations formulated by the Sangha. Acharyadev again came to Gaya and in a meeting convened by him the Pandas agreed to abide by the regulations enunciated in 1924.

Thus the tyranny and oppression practised by the Pandas came to a halt at the instance of Bharat Sevashram Sangha. In Northern India at Gaya, Banaras, Hardwar, Brindaban, Kurukshetra, Prayag or Allahabad, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gouri Kunda at Puri in Orissa, at Nabadwip and Gangasagar in West Bengal, Rameswaram in Tamilnadu & Dwraka in Gujrat everywhere Ashram or hermitage of the Sangha is now installed. The Sangha-volunteers look to the comforts of the visiting pilgrims and on every occasion whenever pilgrims assemble, the workers of Bharat Sevashram Sangha attend the assemblage and with all their might help the pilgrims whenever needed.

The orderliness devised by the Acharya to teach the Pandas a good lesson for reformation of the pilgrimages was really unique and judicious. Quite peacefully, without applying any violent resistance against the Pandas, he settled the matter with the result that the pilgrims were and would be provided with refuge in the rest house of the Sevashram ; and environment favourable for regular daily practice and observance of religious rites and occasional functions in which the pilgrims participated, was created. Moreover, Acharyadev took the initiative to carry on extensive propaganda by ventilating necessary multi-lingual literatures through the news-papers, conducted prolonged relief works and annually to cater to the needs of the numerous pilgrims at Gaya on the Pitripaksha occasion, at Allahabad, Hardwar and Ujjain on the occasions of the celebrated Kumbha Fair, at Banaras on the blessed occasion of Annakuta, at Puri on the gala ceremony of Rath-Jatra or Chariot-Festival of Lord Jagannath and at Shonepur during the grand fair of Harihar Kshettra. But a World-Teacher cannot remain contented only with doing this, he ever goes on and on steadily with patience and unceasing agility and wins the race.

Swamiji Maharaj undertook another stupendous responsibility in reformation of the pilgrimages of the Hindus. He did not hesitate a bit to warn the heads of different temples, abbeys and religious sects for making the best use of immense properties and unaccountable huge funds amassed by them, as trustees of the pious Hindu people from time to time for defraying expenses for expansion of socio-religious services all over India, negligence or failure of which would lead to their

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consfiscation by the Court of Law. All the religious leaders were summoned in many a religious conference to hold seminars and discussions and thereby find out possible means with a view to launching social welfare activities for the nation. Desh-Bandhu Chittaranjan Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru and a few popular political leaders of the land—all praised the yeoman's service rendered by Acharyadev for furthering national reconstruction. The esteemed the then dailies were also not lagging behind them in championing these services and movements.

In course of time these Sevashrams or Service centres of the pilgrimages of India became centres of preaching and organisational activities, which provided everybody—the high and the low—with the same amenities making them oblivious of their petty differences with transfusion of the spirit of universal wakefulness and emotional integrity in them. Thus Acharya Swami Pranavananda through his reformatory socio-religio-moral-cultural movements and humanitarian services came to be recognised, loved and adored as the uncrowned monarch of the people, and paved the way for the significant remarkable programme of nation-constituting cherished hitherto.

In 1924 Acharyadev declared confidently that the Bharat Sevashram Sangha would be recognised by the people of India only for his works done in different pilgrimages ; this came true in letter and spirits[2]. If he had not done any other thing, he would be remembered by his countrymen with sincere gratitude for whatever he had done to eradicate the nuisance of various holy places of India.

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1 The Divine Life-Builder Swami Pranavananda, published by Swami Vikashanandaji, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Calcutta, 1988, p. 42.

2 English rendering of Swamiji's bold utterance culled from the article 'Tnar Smriti—Tnar Sangha' inserted in and complied by Swami Nirmalananda in Shri Shri Pranavananda—Shata Rupe, Shata Mukhe, published by Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Calcutta, 1392 B. S., p. 63.

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IX

HINDU ORGANISATION MOVEMENT

A NON SECTARIAN UNIVERSAL MOVEMENT

Religion, the very soul of Indian Culture, loses its essence without its bearing on our socio-national integrity. It pained the Saint-Saviour and Architect-Founder of the Divine Mission to discern that despite various movements and reforms initiated by many-socio-political leaders in India, it is the problem of National integration that baffled them and stood in the way of national progress. He, therefore, embarked on the Hindu Milan Mandir (Unity Centre of the Hindus) movement. He sent his clarion call to the Hindus of every village, town and city of Bengal and of the country, irrespective of caste, class and creed to get together, meet and unite on a common platform for getting their trifling social and sectarian differences, to work together for the all-round welfare of the society and the Nation with a view to reforming and reorienting the Hindus, the largest majority of the total population in India. Purely non-political in character, the Milan Mandir is a place where the problems of the society will be dwelt on for solutions thereof, where untouchability will not exist, casteism will take its adieu and sectarianism passes away automatically. Through his Sangha, the living organism epitomising Hindu Society, Acharyadev undertook a well devised net-work in order to hasten welfare services for the tribals and scheduled castes, and carried on physical training, moral, spiritual and constructive activities as

well through the Milan Mandir organisation, all the centres of which are interlinked with one another and closely related to the central one or the pivot round which they revolve, Any corner of the land beset with any problem will communicate the same to all so that the entire nation may come forward and work as one unit to solve it and convince each and every individual of the standing up of the whole nation behind him. United and integrated we stand, divided and disintegrated we fall. Number, however enormous, is of no worth if there is no unity, no integrity, no organisation. This was the spirit behind the Milan Mandir Movement set afloat by the Acharya.

HINDU MILAN MANDIRS AS THE PIVOT OF THIS NON-SECTARIAN MOVEMENT

Acharyadev's activities through his Divine Mission—Bharat Sevashram-Sangha—had endeared himself to all and sundry so that he, with his gigantic personality and philanthropic services, founding of academic institutions, vigorous moral and spiritual reforms, untiring dynamic propaganda tours, teaching and preaching, now came down from the high altitude of divination and supernatural powers, and became a saviour and preceptor—a loving, benign companion, counsellor and leader of the poor, sick and downtrodden, distracted house-holders, masses, and of the juvenile, young learners.

OBJECTS & AIMS : A SURETY TO HINDU SAMAJ SAMANVAYA MOVEMENT

Evil-mongers and mischief-makers had already become his adversaries out of sheer malice and envy,

though they were negligible in number ; obviously they had tried to create hindrances in his path of progress by indulging in spiteful propaganda to defame his image as a Saint-Saviour and Guardian of the oppressed, neglected multitude. When the climax of their fishing in the muddy water came to his knowledge through the highly perturbed ascetic-followers, Acharyadev, in order to dismantle all those malign invectives, set himself in under-taking a broad based movement for nation-building incorporating into it the preceding movements and services of his Sangha. He apprised the ascetic followers in a gathering of his scheme saying—" We will create such a platform where Hindus of all denominations may meet together. This platform will be known as "Milan Mandir". This will be the dynamo house of the Hindus -- the centre of religious preaching, cultural and reformation centre of the society so to say--- As in ancient times Lord Shiva established Shaktipithas (Sanctuaries for worship of strength and virility) all over the country, so also Incarnation of Shiva of this day wants to establish these in every village.

"This Milan Mandir will be just like the church of the Christians and mosque of the Muslims. There will be Vedic prayer, Bhajan Kirtan (devotional songs in praise of God), rendering of scriptures and discussions and deliberation to find out the solution of the problems (of the family, the society and the nation) This will bring about consciousness of unity and Dharma (Religion) ---

There will be a prayer hall, a school, a library, a common granary, a gymnasium, a charitable dispensary, panchayet, and arrangement of relief for the protection

of the society, improvement of the village, welfare of the tribals and other welfare activities. A committee elected by the villagers will conduct the activities. The head office will be at Calcutta and there will be centres in every district town, sub-division and village under it. In this way, it will spread all over Bengal and other provinces. If this organisation of the Hindus, on the basis of the Dharma (Religion) be successful, then the unity of the Muslims and Christians will not lag behind."[1] This being the most practical and plausible (tangible) step for national integrity which will remove dissensions and disunties, differences and enmities, feuds and quarrels within and without. Acharyadev's address in this regard in a conference prior to going on a tour for Hindu Organisation solidarity in Comilla, Noakhali, Chitagong etc. was not intended for any destardly persons, but for those who could dedicate their impurities and give away the best drop of their blood. "The meeting of Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukhopadhyay was attacked at Commilla by the riff-raffs", he said, "and in the event of our meeting being attacked in the same way, what should be our modus operandi." He who appeared with the omnipotence and spirit of Nila Rudra Shiva in mortal frame could obviously seek gallant fighters to save Religion, Society and the Nation at the cost of their lives instead of cowardly persons who die many times before their death. Hinduism being the sole religion divested of dogmatism or any rigidity of creed and only the Hindus augmenting tolerance and catholicity throughout the passage of its national existence, the fundamental object of his Hindu Organisation movement was to scatter the ideas and ideals of Hindu religious Culture so that an environment of enduring peace and mutual

Fellow-feeling and understanding, love and co-existence might grow, actively aided by well-disciplined, well-organised mighty Hindu nation. The Hindu Society had seen so many socio-religious reform movements during the last few countries. Hence the question arises if there was anything original in the Hindu Sangathan. (Organisation) movement of Swami Pranavananda Our answer should be : yes, there was : but the Hindus were never given a name as "Hindus" by Swamiji's predecessors. Leaders and reformers there were many to organise and summon the disciples of Muhammad and of Christ under the denomination "Mohammedans" and 'Christians'. The Brahma or Arya Samajees had organised and enlightened only particular limited classes of the Hindus, but not the masses of the entire society, thus keeping them ignorant, sluggish and inactive in the all-enveloping gloom of prejudices and superstitions. The Acharya's magnaniomous soul ached and so he resolved to engage in founding the Milan Mandir (Unity centre) and Rakshidal (Defence Army) Movement, uniting the Hindus of every section, caste and creed denominating them 'Hindus', enabling the nation to respond as and when summoned by its own favourite name. He firmly believed that the growing awareness of the self-oblivious, degenerated, devitalised Hindu multitude as Hindus would stir up the energy innate in them, re-orienting and revitalising them into a well-organised valiant Hindu nation freeing them from cataclasm and inertia of all sorts.

"If I be favoured with the Divine will to live five years more, I shall be in a position to organise the total Hindu population in such a manner that nobody, no worldly force could attempt at touching it even with a finger". This bold utterance came out of his lips at

the sight of the alarming future of the Bengalee Hindus for eradication of which he plunged headlong into incessant work without sleep and respite of any sort whatsoever, for he was in the know of genuine and unbroken rest that day when his mortal body would lie in the grave for ever ; he could not think of rest or repose before that. Not remaining satisfied, he decided to pay visit to the well-known villages and towns of East Bengal and North Bengal to (i) instil in the heart of the distressed, persecuted Hindus a true enthusiasm for integrity and orientation, self-confidence and virility as safeguards of their self-awakening, (ii) embolden the organisers of the Hindu militia or Rakshidal with excess of incentive to keep the Organisation go on shouldering great responsibilities, and (iii) call the local leaders and apprise them of the plight of the Hindu people, their fellow-beings, with a view to sharing with them the need and responsibility of instituting Hindu Milan Mandir as a common platform where Hindus of all classes might assemble togethor, thereby ventilating to organise village militia in each and every village.

This, he hoped fervently, would bring about consciousness of unity, religious fervour and spiritual earnestness among the whole Hindu population and impart training in such a manner as to enable them to appreciate the utilitarian significance of the movement and carry it forward to fruition with faithful, efficient performance of their responsibilities. This venture of his founded on religion, he anticipated, would prove its worth and excellence by supplementing all other movements sponsored for amelioration and progress of the nation uptil then, without facing any one's contradiction and opposition. Installation of prayer hall, school, library, common granary, gymnasium, charitable

dispensary, panchayet, relief work for rural recanstruction, protection of the oppressed, humiliated people, well-being of the tribal people and other humanitarian services to be organised and conducted by committees of elected representatives from among the rural folks with their head quarters in the metropolis, i.e., Calcutta and different centres in the district sub-divisional towns and villages under its purview. All these, we have already seen, were his aims and objects to find out the solution of the eventual problems. He spared no pains to diffuse this notion and life-building movement all through Bengal and other provinces of India, because he was sure of the inevitable success of this religion-based great revolutionary organisation, obviously the first of its kind, to ensure the future of Hindu-Muslim-Christian unity and integrity by doing away with evil forces of difference, dissonance, discord and disunity going on rampant all over the country.

ACHARYADEVS OPINION ON HINDU-MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN UNITY

Swamiji warned the nation that there was no way out along the path of persuasion to cater to and meet up unjust demands of several communities suggested and adopted by the political leaders of India to bring about common concord. Hindu, Muslim and Christian unity, he stated convincingly, would synthesise and synchronise with the problem of integration of Hindu Society : "The sooner the Hindus get organised, the faster the Hindu, Muslim and Christian unity will be feasible. Because, unity is feasible between equals and never between the weak and the strong".[2] He saw the Mohammedans and the Christians standing united and well-organised, naturally mighty and stable. He was

also shocked to see that despite numerical superiority of the Hindus to those hostile sects, strangely enough they were frail, timid and unstable owing to lamentable lack of unity and organisation, as India's primary and crying need could not be so much as that of unity between the Hindus and the Muslims and as that of bringing about an augmentation of it amongst the Hindus themselves; priority ought to be given to the same for the betterment of the nation as the object of the most important consideration, absolutely devoid of sectarianism and parochial meanness.

From 1934 to 1938, Acharyadev spread his Movement of 'Readjustment of the Hindu Society'—his arduous task of nation-building over Behar, Orissa, Assam and the United Provinces next to Bengal. The first Hindu conference he organised in February, 1935, which was attended by eminent leaders of urban and rural areas and a lac of all classes and creeds of Hindus in addition to two regular sittings and quite a good number of religious ceremonies with demonstration of athletics and sports through heroic physical feats and display of arms, was held at the sacred seat of his Divine Realisation of Bajitpur with declaration of the Acharya before the mammoth gathering that this movement of purely non-sectarian and non-political nature aims at re-adjusting Hindu Society for its all-round improvement and thereby building up of a forceful Hindu nation on religio-spiritual ideals as its goal; lends unstinted co-operation to organised system or body which is at work for social amelioration of the Hindu population, intends to concede to the depressed untouchables their respectives 'tatus in the society, and to arrange to unite the scattered, distracted' Hindu multitudes all over the country for instituting Hindu

Milan Mandirs as in villages and towns, inviting Hindus from all castes or creeds to join in all the religious and cultural performances of the Hindu unity centres on equal status, holding regular weekly assemblage or rendezvous on scriptural interpretations, common prayers and rituals, Vedic sacrifices, lectures and talks on socio-economic problems and means of their solution, organising free primary academic institutions and charitable dispensaries for the poor sections of Hindus, creating an atmosphere favourable for catholic thoughts and ideas to enable the apostates to re-enter the Hindu society on Re-conversion ceremony and accommodating the aboriginals in proper positions in the Hindu Society.

● ORGANISATION OF HINDU RURAL MILITIA

Numberless Hindu conferences were organised and attended by Acharyadev at Allahabad and Banaras in U. P., Puri in Orissa, Gaya in Bihar, towns and villages of the districts of Jessore, Pabna, Khulna, Faridpur, Dacca, Barisal, Howrah during the year 1938. In a conference held at the Kumar Singha Hall in Calcutta by the month of July, 1938 convened by the Acharya, the Sangha-monks harangued on the precarious situation of the Hindus and their sufferings in East & North Bengal under Muslim League regime. Acharyadev convinced the disintegrated Hindu leaders of the imperative necessity of re-organising and re-uniting the Hindus through Hindu Unity centres and Rural Militia in the villages of Bengal to ensure security of the persecuted Hindus. For a thorough discussion on means and ways for self-defence of the helpless Hindus of Bengal he summoned a gala Hindu conference in

August, 1938 which was presided over by Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukhopadhyay and attended by distinguished leaders of the Hindu society like Sri Manmatha Nath Mukherjee, Sir Nilratan Sarkar, Sri U. N. Brahmachari, Sri B. C. Chatterjee, Dinesh Chandra Sen, Ramananda Chattopadhyay, Hem Chandra Ghosh, Mrinal Kanti Ghosh, Hirendra Nath Dutta, Kumar Premanath Ray. All present in the gathering unanimously opined in favour of the programme of Milan Mandirs & Rakshidal or Militia movement launched by Acharyadev as the only solution of self-protection of the Hindus.

That this was a socio-religious movement strong enough for constituting the nation on religious, moral ideas was within the knowledge of his monastic disciples who were made alert that in the event of their failure to solve the existing social problems, mere routine work of preaching & teaching of spiritual, moral principles would be futile. Besides holding such big Hindu conferences, he sent many a Sangha-monk and worker as preacher-organisers in small groups for propaganda work in villages & towns with the mission of ramifying Hindu Milan Mandir movement which, within a period of few years, had the desired effect of implementing a sound footing on expansion of nearly more than two thousand unity centres over a unanimous solid support of all classes of Hindus throughout a considerable number of States of the country.

In a congregation of lacs of pious Hindu saints and monks at the Prayag Kumbha Mela (Kumbha Fair) thousands and lacs of pamphlets were distributed for the purpose of dissemination and ventilation of thoughts and principles of Hindu nation-building. The monastic members and workers of the Sangha visited all

the hermitages and 'akhras' (places where the Vaishnavas assemble for religious worship) over there and expounded to the authorities, asceties and devotees concerned, the aims and objects of Acharyadev's Hindu Sangathana (Organisation) and Hindu Milan Mandir Movement.

THE ACHARYA'S UNTIRING, INCESSANT PROPAGANDA TOUR IN VILLAGES AND TOWNS TILL THE CLOSE OF HIS MORTAL EXISTENCE

We are amazed to see indeed that from 1934 onwards the Acharya rushed through villages & towns with the violent speed of a whirlwind. During his movement from here and there, he used to visit more than four or five villages daily, reaching several villages at dead of night. He was hungry, tired out and caught cold : yet he had the warmth of burning feeling within him that was proof enough against the biting, pinching cold without, The villagers found in him a great saviour of theirs to whom they could lay bare their problems. His extensive tour gave motion to the tidal waves of his movement in Bengal and in other states as has already been stated. Series of communal strifes by this time designed by the Mohammedans under the patronage of the Muslim League here and there broke out which took a huge toll of lives of so many meek pacifist Hindu men and women and brought indescribable damage of their properties too, including the Hindu minority of East Bengal, particularly the humiliation and persecution of Hindu women. Swami Pranavananda proved his worth of responding to the call of the hour and stood by them in all respects like Lord Shiva standing by us in our woeful plight. He

took solemn oath to set another organisation in motion —Rural Militia—to repulse the atrocity of the brutes by calling forth Hindu leaders of eminence to come ahead and resort to positive strong measures to put a successful check to the riot-mongering heinous ruffians.

The command of Acharyadev to the ascetic preachers was "Tour from district, to district, organise Rakshidal (village Defence Army) and collect their signature on this bond".[3] A gala conference arranged by Acharyadev and presided by Sir Manmatha Nath Mukherjee was held in Calcutta in the month of March, 1940 during the occasion of Shivaratri ceremony, which resolved to organise this village Militia of 5 lacs of strong and stout Hindus. After this resolution was passed, Sangha-monks and workers devoted themselves wholeheartedly and enthusiastically to form Hindu Rakshidal from village to village through the whole of Bengal at the mandate of the Saint-Saviour who directed them that any able-bodied man between 15 to 45 years of age limit, trained in self-defence, ever ready to repulse and retaliate any brutal attack on the Hindu society, would be qualified for Rakshidal. They all ought to be equipped with the noblest virtues of virility, heroic courage of physique and mind, manliness and longing for salvation; what they were to shun as greatest sin obviously does imply weakness, cowardice, timidity, narrow-mindedness and selfish interests, of course, on undergoing a training in the use of various lawful weapons and arms for self-protection.

"My concern over the matter is so serious that it knows no bounds after I have had heart-aching

information of unceasing hooliganism and mischiefs of the communal miscreants of Bengal through demolition of Hindu shrines and temples, violation of sanctity of Hindu gods and goddesses, inhuman atrocities perpetrated on the chastity and dignity of Hindu women and devilish depradations"—Acharyadev confidently asserted that political negotiation of any kind would be of no avail, unless and until the Hindu villagers were put into working order and enthused with an iron will of self-protection and tutored in the device of making use of legal weapons, because "no law, no arguments, or the dispensation of justice is an adequate safeguard for one who himself is weak and inactive and unprepared for self-defence".[4] In this context he did remind the leaders of our land of the ever growing dire need of reorienting the Hindu society even in the event of installation of the much debated Hindu-Mohammedan integrity in the sphere of politics, and of re-consolidation and re-unification of the disintegrated Hindus into a well-organised brotherhood in the direction of Hindu religio-socio culture. He assured them of the yeoman's service rendered by his Hindu organisation that would leave no scope for contamination of virus of fanaticism or communal contempt. Orientation and unification of the Hindus rather, he vindicated, as he had done earlier, would lead the Hindu-Mohammedan unity closer to his cherished desire all the more. As he was determined to knit up the Hindu masses and make them a mighty nation on the lives and organisational works of Chhatrapati Shivaji, the great Maratha and Guru Govinda Singh, Saviour and Punjabi or Sikh Hindu nation-builder, he had no doubt that the Hindu Unity Centre and Hindu Rural Militia would serve as a pillar on which the invulnerable, impenetrable edifice

of preservation and self-organisation would very successfully and easily be founded and that solid, tangible building would obliterate the differences and disunities, envy and enmity very soon.

We have lost sight of the vigorous, all comprehensive propaganda tour undertaken by the Acharya along with hundreds of Sangha-monks and workers in Sundarban areas and in the villages and towns of the districts of Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur and Barishal in his huge boat 'The Kandari' well-equipped with all the necessaries—amongst the neglected Hindu community of Paundra-Kshatriya, Kapali Ruidas, placed low in the social order by whom he had been greeted with obeisance and genuflection and who, favoured with his divine benignity and blessings, had not hesitated a bit to get oblivious of their dissensions and embrace one another in genuine brotherly love and affection. Wherever he had gone through the untrodden ways, even in places difficult of access or approach, he organised Hindu conferences instantly through performances of Vedic oblation, choric implorations and religious ceremonies. The ascetics and workers would have to alight from the sailing boat in several groups with musical instruments and singers for chanting the glorious heritage of our soil of the past and frequenting every dwelling in the countryside, inspiring the unsophisticated rustics with a spirit and will for self-defence, rural uplift and Hindu organisation movement set in tremendous motion by the Acharya.

Let us come back once again to the context of Hindu Rakshidal or Rural Militia. Communal miscreants were active in Noakhali, Rajshahi, Dacca, Chittagong, Faridpur, Comilla, and so on. The instant presence of

the village Defence Army deputed by Acharyadev was of magic effect as the wretched, humiliated females breathed the air of deliverance from tyranny and the ruffians receded and melted into insignificance. Considering the devilish depradations and assaults perpetrated on the Hindu minority of villagers in East Bengal, Pranavanandaji planned to undertake another hurricane tour in the vast tract of East and North Bengal in the company of a party of monks, preachers and fellow-workers through the district of Noakhali in May, 1940 and visited Noakhali, Comilla, Chittagong, Faridpur, Khulna districts by August of the same year. As the information of abominable attack of the riff-raffs on Dr. Shyama Prasad and his party in a gathering held at Comilla and Barishal came within his knowledge, Acharyadev got himself and his team well prepared to repulse the same and came on the vanguard with the mighty spirit of Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna at that critical hour and commanded the Hindus in a trumpet-like voice in conferences during these tours to pursue the paths of organisation and positive resistance against the onslaughts and aggressions of the communal mischief-mongers following the examples of Shivaji and Guru Govinda Singh : and he enthused the victims with invigorating spirit of self-preservation, eternal vigilance and manly resistance.

The Sikh Acharya Govinda Singh voiced forth his challenging summon to his devoted followers during the crucial period of relentless inhuman oppression and tyrannical atrocities of the Mohammedan despots who were on the point of obliterating Hinduism and the Hindu Nation, to dedicate their lives. He was elated to see five of his devotees coming ahead to sacrifice their lives on the point of sword and uttered, "Religion

cannot succumb to decay and annihilation where there come forward at least five precious souls to give up their lives." And he consequently offered them sharpened swords to save their motherland, Religion and Nation on initiating them in the solemn swearing of Khalsa (Liberation).

The Great spiritual preceptor and Saint-Saviour of our epoch sent his clarion call in the same way to his Sangha-monks, disciples, workers and all classes of Hindus through the organised body of Defence Army infusing them with the enthusiasm of self-preservation like the Divine protector Lord Shiva. "A real Rakshi", he wrote in an epistle while staying in Ballygunge, Calcutta, on 10.6.1940, "is he who is determined to protest against and remedy the injustice and persecutions and is prepared not to allow anybody to snatch away the rights and privileges from the Hindus and to cause any harm to their religion, honour and prestige so long as a drop of blood exists in his veins. Propagate this ideal of a Rakshi and enlist members for Rakshidal (Defence party). Inspire every Hindu to defend his own honour and prestige and protest against injustice and oppression. If the people are made to understand their real object, then they will eagerly join this 'Rakshidal'. If five lacs of people in the whole of Bengal stand, with the firm determination of self-defence, there is no doubt that the whole atmosphere will be totally changed."[5]

With this aim in view, he initially proposed to organise an enormous defence army consisting of 5 lacs of valiant Rakshi or protector of the Hindus in the last "Shivaratri" Hindu gathering already referred to by which he wanted to awaken the total Hindu population

in the interest of defence of their belief, dignity, prestigious entity, rights and privileges. He also advised his Sangha-monks and workers to propagate the principle of self-realisation and enlist those Hindus as members of Defence party who are resolute to undertake and fulfil such noble vow, "Arise, awake and get united"—was the keynote that was struck in the fiery speeches he delivered in various Hindu conferences during his whirlwind tour from here to there. Five or ten lacs, he added to what he had said erstwhile, would not suffice and serve the desired end, lacs numberless might be needed. So he diffused the Re-adjustment of the Hindu Society and village Militia movements all over the villages and towns of India, particularly in the remote corners of Sundarban, Madaripur and the important districts of East and North Bengal. He intended to serve internal purpose of prosperity and orientation through Hindu Milan Mandir and instil the spirit of infatuation, sweeping motion and self-protection in the Rakshidal or Kshatra Shakti (Militia) of gallant heroic soldiers. He relied mostly on the youngsters from amongst whom at least five after their initiation in the cult of strength should come onward and forsake self-centredness, comfort and luxury, feast and revelry, enjoyment of lustful desire, and render services to their mother India by rigidly following the ideals of self and sense-restraint as well as fidelity to truthfulness. The era of the advent of Acharya Swami Pranavananda was one of hovering gloom and almost baffling problems when the Hindu people were poor victims of frenzied fanaticism, hatred and well-calculated intrigues going on rampant in the Eastern Regions of Bengal and Assam and all over the Punjab & Sindh areas in the west, when the Divine

Nation-Builder and Saint-Saviour very seriously felt the indispensable need of dedication of lacs of such Hindu youths at the altar of religion and nationality to safe-guard the Hindu Religion and Nation. Acharyadev thus set the life-building and nation-building movements afoot and carried his unswerving, incessant activities on like a valiant warrior of warriors till the close of his mortal existence here, on this earth, in the teeth of all reverses and malicious intrigues and oppositions of the opponent sects, his adversaries ; he left the burden or responsibility of bearing the brunt of the Herculean task to ultimate completion for the Hindu masses in general but principally for the sincere votaries and the promising posterity.

SANCTIFICATION MOVEMENT : SUDDHI (RE-CONVERSION) OF THE APOSTATE HINDUS.

Our discussion on Milan Mandir and Rakshidal organisation will remain incomplete and sketchy if we forget to mention what view Swami Maharaj held about the movement of Suddhi or Re-conversion of the apostate Hindus. Hinduism being not a credal religion but a synthetic culture extends catholicity to others no doubt but maintains its Hindu character intact. While carrying on his life and nation-building activities through socio-religio-cultural reforms, Acharyadev initiated Hindu Unity centre and self-defence Army or Rural Militia movements ; but he could not remain indifferent to the question or problem of re-conversion of the renegade Hindus. He did apprise the then Hindu leaders of the fundamental weakness of the Hindus—lack of strength, unity and organisation—which might be attributable to their being humiliated

and molested everywhere. The main object of his integrating the Hindus as a well-compact nation must be to repair their own dilapidated, wretched dwelling. Otherwise, achievement of the unity of the Hindus and the Muslims, however desirable, would inevitably fail to diminish the need for unity and integration of the Hindus. Swamiji's reform was based on universal humanitarian considerations defended by the Vedas, the Upanishadas, the Geeta and other religious scriptures of the ancient Hindu sages of India who, he reminded the Hindus and the Hindu leaders, converted innumerable non-Aryans and gave those proselytes proper positions in the Hindu society and thus contributed a lot to its expansion But the thought of self-complacency, self-conceit and arduous efforts to gain self-expansion made the Hindus dwindle away numerically with the result that they had fallen poor victims to those alien aggressors like Mohammendans and later on Christians who being proselytisers tried their best and often could succeed in converting quite a large number of the Hindus to Islam and Christian faiths and creeds.

Primarily in the Muslim regime during the middle ages and then, since the arrival of the European and alien Christians in India, this proselytising operation had been in a process of continuity, unhindered and unchallenged. It was Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Reformatory movement concerning socio-religion-economic aspects of Indian life, the Arya Samaj (society), whose contribution in respect of national awakening of India in freedom of thought, abolition of caste hatred, protection of Hinduism, reconversion of the converted Hindus, and promotion of national culture, and especially reconversion of the

converted Hindus must deserve mention in this context.

Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji, a Vedic preacher and Teacher of heroic spirit like his predecessor Acharya Swami Dayananda Saraswati, was also a Saint-Saviour. A born thinker like Dayananda, he was determined to remove all superstitions and fanatic creeds. The society he saw around was fettered by the shackle forged by ignorance and blind prejudices. He appeared to snap asunder that shackle and set thrals to liberation. It was contrary to his mission to have his people deprived of their freedom of thought, culture and religion.

A militant young yogi of high order, a thundering controversialist of Indian type, Swami Pranavananda stood firmly by the Hindus and their religious culture. He opposed aggressive Christianity and Islam by crying down their motivated policy of proselytising a vast majority of the Hindus into either Mohammedans or Christians. The renegade Hindus could not come back from the other faiths to Arya faith or Hinduism because of socio-political-economic and various reasons. But they should be taken back and embraced as integral part of our society. "If you invite a man", Swami Pranavananda exhorted, "to your house and shut up your doors against him, would he be of any avail ?".

The Hindu society of his period, he saw with his own eyes, was hovering in the labyrinth of darkness of ignorance, preposterous superstitions and bigotry, reluctant to allow reconversion and re-adjustment of the apostates and the low and downtrodden including the aboriginals. The crying need of the hour, he perceived, was to instil into them a spirit of integrity,

mutual understanding and unstinted cooperation, self-preservation and self-development, so that the lion's potency and strength slumbering in them might be awakened for which a well devised disciplined progressive organisation was an imperative necessity. Then and then only the process of re-converting a convert would be feasible or practicable. To effect and implement this he shouldered the onus of reconverting the renegades into the Hindu fold and binding or or knitting them up through constructive net-work of Hindu Milan Mandirs and Rural Militia or Hindu self-defence Army. He deffused the reformatory movement all over India, and sought whole-hearted assistance from all, high and low, in this regard to make this regular, massive programme of service a grand success. The radical changes of socio-religious customs initiated and augmented by the Acharya were perfectly in unison with the spirit of the age and of the noble cultural heritage of India. All these were the reasons for which this sanctification or purification movement of Swamiji Moharaj had reverential acceptance among the neglected Hindus, particularly the aboriginals. His Hindu Milan Mandir and Self-defence Army movements on the basis of universal ideal of religion made a signal contribution to our nationalism, and he gave it a local habitation and a new wave through this re-conversion of the apostate Hindus. 'Hindu Milan Mandir' programme of work initiated and materialised by Acharyadev is the only inevitable and constructive step and we, the Hindus all, will have to undertake to safeguard the rights and privileges of our society, put a check to conversion of the Hindus, our fellow-beings, and thereby broaden the horizon of the suddhi or Re-conversion movement.

THE WORLD-PRECEPTOR'S OUTLOOK ON UNTOUCHABILITY AND DEVICE OF ERADIATCING THIS SOCIAL EVIL

The world-teacher with his prophetic vision could easily visualise that in view of the problem of Hindu-Mohammedan disintegration, the task of nation-building would be a complex one. Instead of rooting out differences and dissensions in the society and effecting national integrity like our national heroes, Acharyadev exerted his best to bring about common concord without widening the gulf between the quarrelling communities in the line of those leaders who trod the path of persuasion and fulfilled to meet undue demands of certain communities. He moved several steps forward and synchronised Hindu-Mohammedan-Christian unity with that of the Hindu society, alienating parochial narrowness and sectarianism, keeping in mind that the first and foremost consideration for greater interest of the nation was the problem of unity amongst the Hindus themselves for solution of which they would have to restore their ruinous house to put right again first by embracing the low and downtrodden, like 'Namashudra, Paundra, Bauri, Hadi, Mochi- as part and parcel of the Hindu society. With his saintly personality and earnest zeal for emancipation of all kinds, especially of these downtrodden multitude and untouchables, he came onward with the indomitable will to strive, to seek, to reach the goal, and not to yield. He vehemently condemned the caste system founded on the privilege of heredity only as an unpardonable sin that had been sapping the vitality of the Hindu society for a long span of several centuries; he was ready to concede a high position or status in our society to a person who happened to hail from a

low caste or class, though he did not waver an inch from his belief in personal moral excellence and purity. A bold champion of the untouchables, it was beyond his thought how a Hindu could treat another Hindu as untouchable. Inter-caste marriage might be challenged but there might arise no logic against untouchability which could not be advocated. He fought valiantly to remove this accursed social evil by propagating the doctrine of equality of all Hindus, breaking all barriers of caste and creed, existing socio-religio-economic status through Hindu Milan Mandir and Rural Militia movements and directing his followers to exert their might and effort for redress of these so-called untouchables; these people should be, he asserted, cordially and equally greeted with the caste-Hindus in regular meetings and ordinary socio-religio-cultural performances organised under the suspices of Hindu Milan Mandirs from village to village town to town. He appealed to the so-called, self styled intellectuals of the present epoch to receive and regard the aboriginal outcastes as indivisible and integral factor. He contended that during the days of the Ramayana and since then these untouchables who could not be called untouchables at all had been looked down upon by the high-stationed Hindus as social pariahs as a consequence of which the Hindus have dwindled away in number, falling victims to the aggressive converters belonging to exotic creeds like Christianity and Islam. For eradication of this cancer Swamiji added that if the backward low classes of Hindus who have been rather forced to stand outside the pale of the society as untouchables be conceded acquisition of their position and status in the society beside caste Hindus in no time; they should be given privileges

of all sorts for living in good manner, right conduct, suavity or enlightemment and entrusted with the task of shouldering equal responsibility like men of status and dignity, because tremendous prowess lies latent in these isolated untouchables who are given to physical as well as mental stamina, who should no longer be neglected lest they might fall victims to allurements extended towards them by the proselytising alien aggressors and followers of other sects and make the Hindu society weak or unstable. Loving service to men as one's own self is loving service to God in every living being – to materialise this truth of truths Swamiji wandered from village to village, embraced the aboriginals and scheduled castes with his characteristic benign affection and instituted schools and service centres to cater to their needs and demands, providing them with amenities of reading and reciting Vedic hymns and scriptures in the regular gatherings of Hindu Milan Mandirs, arranging to feed them together with the Sangha-monks and enlightened, pious Hindus, instructing them to get rid of their inferiority complex. To this effect he undertook first to put forward the massive programme of Hindu Samaj Samanvaya Movement for organising and uniting them under the banner of Hinduism through restless activities of Hindu Milan Mandir and Rakshidal organisations. It is no wonder that he who completely ignoring the bare necessaries and comforts of his personal life remained absorbed in the engrossing, all-absorbing thought of welfare and betterment of the entire society ought to direct and guide the dedicated preachers and workers to move with hectic speed about rural areas everywhere and set up Hindu Unity centres.

ACHARYADEVA'S ATTITUDE TO WIDOW RE-MARRIAGE :

Persuaded neither by the prescribed norms of Parashara, nor by the forceful defence of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swamiji expressed his disapproval of the thought of the second marriage of a widow to trains of those champions of the same approaching him for its ratification and sanction on the ground of adding quite a good number to the total population, prevention of unsuccessful or arrested birth of a child and incestuous wedding as a positive remedy of abduction and molestation of females by non-Hindu miscreants in general. A double standard of morality for men and women was not upto his liking, and Swamiji was in favour of complete prohibition of the second marriage of widow, since it would invite divorce, family disputes and lead many a noble family to blotting out of existence with their properties destroyed, and loss of true wedded love and violation of duty to the deceased husband in addition to the greater crisis of the chaste, pristine maidens. That our Hindu society could not thrive in view of shallow, surface pieces of work made up of odds and considerations as per Western politics, Christian or Moslem rules or methods of morality formulated on sheer materialistic ideas and gratification of purely sensual desires, was voiced forth as warning by Acharyadev to the counsellors of widow-remarriage of his time. Not to live by bread and temporal enjoyments even below the level of brutes and beasts alone, but to live a life of purity, inspiration of exalted spirituality and self-discipline, not to demolish the religious base of Hindu-society by sanctioning widow remarriage, but to stabilise and sublimate its

ethical standard was his revelation of reproof against the advocates of widow re-marriage.

References

1 Quoted from Acharyadev's exhortation, The divine Life Builder Swami Pranavananda, published by Swami Vikashananda, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Calcutta, 1988, pp. 62, 63.

2 Ibid, p. 58.

3 Ibid, p. 64.

4 Swami Vedananda's The prophet of the Age, 2nd Ed., Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Calcutta, p. 208.

5 The Sangha-Geeta, published by Swami Vedananda, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Calcutta, 1967, Epistle No. 21, pp. 106-107.

6 Quotation extracted from Swami Vedananda's The Prophet of the Age, 2nd Ed., Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Calcutta, p. 195.

X

APOTHEGMS OR MESSAGES OF THE DIVINE SEER : THEIR UNIVERSALITY & RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji is mainly known to the common run of humanity as a performer of socio-humanitarian services. But he stands almost peerless as an indefeasible, unwearying teacher and preacher practising the system of purifying one's soul by means of example and action. His austere, arduous ascetic vow, his Himalayan spiritual personality, the laws or directives conducing to attaining salvation induced by him resemble to a great extent those of Gautama Buddha and Shankaracharya for welfare of mankind which have gained currency no doubt, but not as much as desired. It seems to us a wonder of wonders why that distinctive aspect of his dynamically cosmic life—his come-and-go from the sphere of multiplex activities for human welfare to that of knowledge and wisdom, his invaluable, eternal contribution behind doing good for all living creatures remain unexplored to the greatest number of people.

People are well acquainted with the huge bulk of activities organised and accomplished by him when he was living, having his sway in this temporal world in human shape. At the sight of his Sangha's charitable, philanthropic service, spread of spiritual-moral ideas and ideals, reform of holy places, dissemination of knowledge and education, Hindu Samaj Samanvaya,

Milan Mandir and Rakshidal movements for life and nation-building on the basis of religion of which he himself was the architect, performer and leader and which wholeheartedly aided by his disciples, workers and votaries stirred tremendous enthusiasm and commotion all over the land. Our countrymen were all overwhelmed with thrilling rapture. But few of those thrilled admirers could perceive properly the gigantic spiritual personality who was ever at work behind all this.

Our efforts to unfold the true nature of componendo or the Yogic path of spiritual attainment and infinite power of unification of such an omnipotent, omniscient yogi may be sketchy, imperfect. That has been and can be done only by those associates and followers graced with his benignancy and belief. As we take into account and pursue the path of his Divine Life—his dalliance with life so to say—from the onset to the end, we discover each and every adroit function is merely a part of his pre-conceived, uninterrupted flow of performance ; his ingenuity in executing assorted deeds and life pertaining to the Supreme Being is one and indivisible. To view him alienated from this would be blunderous.

The laws or directives for attainment of final salvation and consummation of religiosity and action he set going are complimentary to each other. The secret lies in the extraordinary unifying, integrating, daring dexterity of a superhuman yogi like him who arduously endeavoured to achieve his end which has served as a beaconlight guiding the erring humanity to tread the right path, "Work is worship, worship is work" : exemplifying this ideal in his own life he has

stirred the whole of mankind to enthusiastic, dedicated service.

Should we intend to ascertain the characteristic trait of divine inspiration and utilitarian, practical implementation of that God-ordained power in welfare service for humanity of the Great World-Teacher and Saint-Saviour, we are to imbibe and give effect to Sangha-Vani or the essential principles of the Sangha preached and propagated to inculcate various norms and ideologies to fulfil the demands and needs not merely of his time but of all times to come. Flashes of insight and intuition that illumined his soul have taken the form of these luminous aphorisms of pure wisdom; these are not only pithy sayings but also are profound revelations of breathing spirituality and each, in its own way, epitomises the Great Master' ambrosial maxims. Acharyadev himself is querer and respondent to the fifteen questions and answers thereof. He appears in both these significant roles to further mass education and mass welfare. The first ten of these interrogations and their replies have come out in the form of series of clues or trails, while the last five have been elucidated as expositions. The first ten queries may appear indisputable and inextricable to a devotee earnestly essaying to reach his destination, while the rest five can direct and lead him to the exact, perfectly right path to traverse with their detailed, amplified analysis. Studying between the lines and meditating these aphorisms to worshipping the Sangha-Lord and ours will be a fruitless endeavour if we are emboldened enough in our striving to acknowledge the Lord merely through multifarious services to the Divine Sangha and the Nation as well unless and until we realise and imbibe his apothegms first.

A universal Nation-constituting Seer of this time and beyond this epoch, Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji, we should bear in mind in this context, underwent austerities of a great Yogi, reached the height of beatitude, inspired and enkindled our nation with the transcendental resplendence of his realisation, ushered in accordingly in pithy sayings, pregnant with brevity and sublime spirituality, the aspirations and missions of the age. He would spare a considerable part of his ever busy time in dictating these apothegms himself on many and diverse occasions and got them written down by a few of his associates and followers. Some of his messages came out in print known as The Sangha-Geeta in view of his selecting and making use of the title "Sangha-Neta" or Leader of the illustrious Missionary Organisation—he instituted after Gautama Buddha who set up nearly some two thousand five hundred years ago his Buddhist Sangha which was the first of its kind—whose gospels his disciples culled and compiled long after his demise like the everlasting wise, discreet maxims of Lord Krishna manifested in code in the great epic The Mahabharata by the hoary, wise sage Vedavyasa on His demise, or in the same manner in which the followers of Jesus Christ were intent on writing his parables and wise sayings after his crucification.

● The first question is : What is the goal of life ? Swami Pranavananda in a voice as grave and loud as the sound made by the blowing of a conch responds : Universal Liberation and Self-realisation. This is the fundamental and perennial query of our existence because we fail to take any moving start if our destination is not settled. It is self-realisation that invariably

leads to emanicipation of all; for self-realisation necessitates emanicipation. Our aim and object should be one. So, despite the fact that two words are there, as a matter of fact they are one and the same. Whatever be the ascription and notion of deliverance, people belonging to all communities, societies, brotherhood, associations, races or bands are desirous of enjoying ecstatic delight of extrication, freedom from obstruction or restrictions. Self-realisation and the final salvation, however, bear the same meaning. When all the problems get resolved on self-realisation, an embodied soul on realisation of the Eternal Soul can arrive at a state of beatitude of deliverance. "Know thyself. He who is conscious of his own Self, is a self-obliterator"[1] —so goes there the proclamation of the great sages of the Upanishads. The individual Self and the Supreme Self (Self of an individual and Self of the Absolute or Brahman, the perennial spring of supreme knowledge and deepest delight) are one and inseparable. The Supreme Self being all-immanent, omnipotent, unimaginable, unmanifest, unchangeable, all-seeing and eternal, we are to aspire to know and make Him out if we need strength and stamina, peace and serenity, if we want to get rid of the bondage of anguishing ache and sufferings of all sorts.

This truth of truths is not futile even in the case of those who are sceptical of it, because everyone loves oneself without contradiction. One must aspire to and long for awakening, unfolding, and blooming of one's infinite knowledge and latent qualities or immeasurable possibilities, rapture, virility, resplendence. Is there any religion, opinion or expedient or mode of manner that does not repeatedly study, practise or cultivate self-awakening, i.e. Self realisation and Self-manifestation ?

We learn from Swami Pranavananda a coinage not previously known or heard of : 'Universal Imancipation', which captures our attention with its newness and far-reaching significance. Its kind being something uncommon, unforeseen, unprecedented, its import can be perceived from assorted viewpoints : Harmonisation of all the notions of deliverance, freedom of the whole and all-pervading liberation. In the first place, without ignoring any one of the prevalent beliefs in emancipation or salvation, Acharyadev mingled all these in it. Secondly, each of its flow runs towards attainment of deliverance of a certain section of people, often bringing about conflict in various sections But it will be definitely beneficial to all alike in effecting Universal Emancipation. And thirdly, it strives to solve all terrestrial aflictions and efface all sorts of man's woes. That goal or aim, that is, Universal Emancipation is attainable if we pay heed to the great Spiritual Master's proclamation of the golden possibility of pursuing the path of Religion along with its ideals of self-restraint and dedication, Truth and sense-restraint, this being the second lesson we learn from the Sangha-Vani or the 'Message of the Sangha' delivered and put into action by the Sangha Lord.

● What is Dharma or Religion ? Swamiji's response is : Renouncing, Self-restraint, Truthfulness and Sense-discipline. The Sangha promulgates these as the most significant elements of parts of that cherished path, the true principles and quintessence of all religions. That this exposition or religion is something revolutionary goes without saying. What remains as residue on rejection of its outer surface or chaff is this Renunciation. Truth, Self-discipline and continency. As a boatman, who casts anchor and then plies or punts,

cannot make the boat move onward an inch, so also without the austere practice of Renouncing, Self-retraint, Truth and Sense-control one cannot take a single step forward on the path of realisation of spirituality and the Supreme Being. These, in Swamiji's opinion, will abhor the void of religious austerity and usher in a silent, far-reaching revolution in the realm of religion. "The essence of Dharma or Religion", Swamiji asserts, "lies in practice, performance and realisation of these attributes of religion which can transfuse rejuvenescence and resuscitation, vivacious and volatile force in all kinds of faiths or creeds, tenets or doctrines in all communities and societies and thereafter pave the ground for solution of religious discords and conflicts." just as the incessant fresh showers of the Monsoon refresh the thirsty flowers and dried up leaves drooping under the scorching sun-rays and help the flower-buds blossom out. Difference of religion and sect may be eliminated at the same time if it rests on this. "Religiosity is not attainable by mere physical perusal of scriptures, indulgence in rituals or from hearsay. Frantic, wayward is his effort who seeks to unmask and solve the mysteries or secrets of spiritual existence with reliance on a mind swayed and tattered by passions, overpowered by tyranny of senses and anguished by sensual desires". Will any body or sect who has got the nectar-like taste of the extract of religion ensue a noisy quarrel or the terrible fight of Kurukshetra with its upper surface or skin-pran ?

Taking for granted the prevalence of welfare factors in every science studying religious knowledge or belief conducive to place and time, we the Hindus see that all other religions and sects are swayed by wild, fanatic, bestial force and money-power to supersede us and top

the list, forgetting that a common ground invites them all to meet together by shattering debates and distrust, disunities and differences. Without bringing forward any new exposition, the Sangha-Lord has brought home to us a short-cut, concrete, practical, straight route that does not cause ache or contradiction with any body's belief or conviction. How, with what a renaissance of wonder, he does utter ! "There is no Dharma or Religion in counting of beads, in the marks on the forehead and not even in the Vedas, the Puranas, or the Koran, not in this or that food or dress, not in temple, mosque or Church either. The very existence of Dharma virtually depends on practice, realisation and in renunciation, self control, truth and sense-control".[2]

With what a tremendously volatile force did the Acharya tutor and enliven his followers to be equipped with eternal ideas and worthy of being seated in the Shrine of the wise Aryan sages to guide their aimless and bewildered countrymen in the unerring path of morality and spiritualism with firm conviction that they have been ordained by him to evangelise the principles of religion that lives and thrives on the majesty of sacrifice, truthfulness and self-discipline ! "Success", he was over confident, "is in the hands of those who are firm in their resolution and unflinching in their vow".[3] He wanted to teach the nation this absolute unambiguous truth and transfuse this enthusiasm of vitality in every human being. "Oh children of the Sangha !" he also voiced forth, "Remember, under whom you have taken shelter, his strength and vigour is working through you ··· March on with the prowess of a lion, the success is with you".[4]

• The third principle acquaints us with the

hindrance in the path or means of progress and attainment : What is real death ? We get the answer—self oblivion, i, e., the proneness and yielding to forgetting. Though we are torn by agonies of woe and suffering, loss or pain, we are in the habit of disentangling ourselves from these agonies. The Upanishad says, "To become oblivious of the Supreme Eternal within is suicdal". Physical death, the Geeta does chant, "resembles change of garments, putting off the tattered ones and wearing the fresh ones." Self-forgetfulness, in this sense, is nothing but real death. But there is also solace the Geeta leaves for us that the soul only undergoes changes, but never dies with extinction of the mortal frame. Bereavement for mortality is transient and of no use, since re-births follow innumerable deaths. Extinction of self-advancement or spiritual inowledge stands for death. Organic death of the imbecile, insensate body happens only once. But forgetfulness of self-elevation or metaphysical knowledge or wisdom keeps us in an interesting state of life-in-death or death so to say, every moment. Awareness of the conscientious mind that 'I am but an inseparable part of the cognizant Supreme Being, the Absolute Atman or Brahma and that my natural disposition, habit, strength and dignity are all supernatural, inspiring man to lead a pristine life with delighted, orderly and disciplined thoughts and actions relating to God or divinity, then and then only on such a soul is showered the highest divine grace and propititiousness. On the contrary, because of ignorance, inert forgetfulness of my own self I fail to obtain the eternal spring of truth, conscientiousness and bliss latent within. It would be wise to remember the sacred sayings of the Ishopanished in this context

that—those who commit the deadly sin of suicide or lack awareness of their veritable self, will step into a land shrouded with utter darkness where there is no 'sun-burnt mirth', and those who are not disillusioned will have their entrance into even a more dreary, gloomy and darker land.[5]

It is regrettable that we have become completely oblivious of our divinely noble heritage of religion and culture so that we cannot send our imagination or thought back to those palmy days. As contrasted with the lofty aims of the teaching community and political heroes, dignified status of men of education as preceptors commanding everybody's reverence, consecration of the life of the Brahmins for social good, regard for the King as representative of God in his Kingdom, the agriculturists and traders Vaishyas' self-sacrifice for the community endowing them with the epithet of 'mahajan', true service rendered by the workman class, quite a considerable number of teachers, professors or political leaders now-a-days have no such aspirations as those of their ancestors—they simply touch without teaching the learners and are reluctant to re-orient and renovate the society morally and intellectually, so that their pupils do not care a bit for character-forming through enlightened education.

It is regrettable that so many educationists of to-day are self-styled ones, doing their go-slow or almost negative duties as mere paid service-holders with the object of minimum work and maximum gain, though they never forget to pretend as men of eminence and indulge in tall talks 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. The devoted Brahmins of the past have been turned into greedy, motivated self-seekers, the Vaishyas unscrupulous money-lenders and veritable

blackers. Filial affection or piety is being laughed at. Quite a considerable number of artists, song-sters, litterateurs instead of being true to their commitments to society stoop so low as to glority atheistic and epicurean philosophy of life of debasement, decadence and weakness, of man in their works with sheer negligence of and indifference to the milieu and millions to lead mankind to a much better, more sublime realisation of truth, welfare and immaculate beauty. Household life has also become a rendezvous of slander, useless gossip and morbid dwelling on enjoyment of carnal desires and gross material pleasures hankering after selfish interests, the house-holders left with unpardonable ignorance of their obligations and duties to the family and community. Acharyadev could diagnose this malady of his age and he exerted his best accordingly to launch an all embracing, all-supporting, all-permeating, all-pervading programme of multifarious welfare activities as a panacea for infusing—self-realisation and self-confidence in the nationals to remove the ghastly dance of the malign phantom of darkness of self-oblivion and self-extinction. His message for the distracted, dagraded humanity runs thus: "Man realises his true humanity by developing the powers lying dormant in him. That is how a man proves his manliness and a hero, his heroism. So, man cannot afford to tolerate the present sorry state of affairs. It is time to devote ourselves to realise our own self by shaking off the drowsiness of slumber and awakening ourselves standing like heroes who refuse to yield in the battle of life, relying on our own strength, fortified with self-confidence".[6]

We get the next significant principle in the form

of interrogation : What is eternal life ? Acharyadev s aphorism, needless to say, is the question and answer thereof : Self-consciousness, self-remembrance and self-conception. For our triumphant march through the path of life what is essentially needed is dauntless enthusiasm, And we can gain this if we are inflamed with the burning zeal of self-awareness, self-remembering and self-conceiving of our ideas or schemes. This body of ours is the temple of Self or Atma or living God who is seated there with His endless dynamic energy eternally, knowing no extinction. It is the Universal Self that lights up the individual Self.

The asertion of the Shwetaswetara Upanishad is that Self-knowledge enables one to enjoy the bliss absolute of immortality[7], realisation of which leads life to its goal. Acharyadev immortalises this truth by cogently observing that if one is conscious of the Self and Self-knowledge within, one will never be oblivious of the same, one will be free from senile indulgence in regard to food and drink and sexual enjoyment that causes severe bodily and mental pain or suffering, and six wicked sinful instinctive tendencies, so that one is directed to universal salvation and beatitude. The same Self dwelling in all of us, we are all put together in a chain of beads or pearls.[8] That if I cause harm to anybody I will cause harm to myself stands as the only means for putting and end to enmity, discord and disruption prevailing in the world-milieu and facilitating universal amity and fraternity.

We are our emancipators, so chants the Geeta. If I am aware of my self, I am dreaded by self-forgetfulness as its veritable foe and befriend myself. The Acharya being an avowed promissory to make the

Sangha-children Self aware commanded them to rise and arouse others; he dedicated his life, his volatile energy and undaunted might through his unwearying services as a Saint-Saviour to protect the nation from imbroglio and decay, cataclasm and disintegration.

A query may often haunt our minds as to extinction of ourselves from absent-mindedness and self-forgetting, which is answered by the infallible, unerring Universal Prophet: Investigate and meditate in solitude and whole-heartedly on these self-interrogations about your entity who you are, wherefrom you do hail and why you are here; and your miserable plight of self-forgetfulness must turn into self-realisation, a sense of awareness of the Real Self. Frailty as well as transience is the name of this mortal frame of ours, whereas complete knowledge or control of Self glories in its eternity.

● How uncommonly common and remarkable the Fifth and Sixth principles in question are! What are genuine virtues and extreme vices? We get in reply the unerring, unfailing and comprehensive verdict of the Acharya that Heroism, Virility, Manliness, and Longing for Deliverance, and Frailty, Timidity, Cowardice, Narrow-mindedness and Selfishness are virtues and vices respectively. Virtues and vices get recognition of all religious tenets. Acts of dedication, munificence, austere religious practices, reverent obedience to the preceptors and other superiors, chant of glorification of worship of gods and goddesses, temperance, earnestness, etc. usually known as pious may pave the ground for man's deliverance through sanctification of the individual's mind and benefit him only. Realising the inevitable close of this, the All-gracious, philanthro-

pic Seer very aptly describes Heroism, Virility, Manliness and yearning for ultimate release from the cycle of birth and death as supreme virtues ; these symbolise combat for human welfare which, he was confident, would be interdependently conducive to individual as well as general good and finally, salvation. Acharyadev's assertion of the certainty of attaining this universal deliverance is founded on the plausible, tangible plea that fortunate and magnificent are those who are gratified with the favour of the Eternal.

The Sangha-Lord made a wonderful synthesis of the inspiring message imparted to Arjuna by Lord Krishna in the righteous war and his Sangha-Geeta, and voiced forth his loud and clear summon to aspirants of the Sangha that perusal and pursuit of the Sangha-Geeta would embolden them to carry on crusade for establishing and protecting Religion and working out universal emanicipation for which they, as torch-bearers of prowess and virility, are to awaken the timid, imbecile and slumbering nation from woes and sufferings. He insisted on their shouldering the colossal responsibility of struggling in the public and spiritual sphere with whole-hearted secrificing endeavour. Heroism and masculinity, in his opinion, are the most potent weapons in this battle against vices and the profligate and sinners, whereas manliness and desire for deliverance are great virtues that enliven and inspire human beings to traverse the path of life with piety, devotion to God and performance of noble deeds. There goes ever a veritable tug-of-war within the mind between heaven and hell, right and wrong, good and ll. Vices perpetrated pull man down to the lower depths of inferno, but virtues bring the beatitude of heaven for him. A righteous, pious person is transported to the King-

gom of God or is adorned with godly attributes. On the contrary, religious or moral lapse makes a person mean-minded, and extremely wicked and sinful so that he or she is degraded down to the level of a demon. That which is supreme to help and prompt a man achieve his optimum object is defined as great virtue, and that which greatly hinders realisation or attainment of this aspiration by deviation from this invites disaster for him hereafter amounting to extreme vice. If we fail to stick to Divine Dispensation, Islam opines, our hope for attaining any of the phases of Mumukshutwa or emancipation will go in vain and life will end 'not with a bang, but a whimper'. The Bible too says that one is to remember that living God is enshrined in the temple of one's mortal frame. And Hinduism more candidly and boldly guides man to establish and vindicate himself in manifestation of everlasting, everliving understanding of good and evil and potentiality of salvation that is already in him to enable him enter the realm of Divinity. A villain with cowardice, timidity, selfish greed and meanness envelops the society with darkness of hellish subdual and sudordination, cuts a very sorry figure and fails to face the trials and tribulations, odds and hazards in the arena of life heroically. A hero equipped with virility, self-dedication, manliness and yearning for ultimate emancipation from the bondage of misery and affliction of birth and death fighting for such exalted ideals is blessed indeed.

WHAT IS REAL STRENGTH ?

Acharyadev's thought-provoking and unambiguous answer to this seventh query put to himself is, the great might of Patience, Fortitude, Endurance and Steadiness.

Cultivation of physical prowess and virility is a 'must' no doubt, but such attributes are also characteristic of animals like lion or elephant or tiger. Should man take mighty pride in physical strength which, according to Swami Pranavananda, is not real strength, what he needs truly is the awakening of his moral and spiritual strength for attaining which he is to face adverse forces within and without. He is torn with a queer conflict of weal and woe, good and bad, right and wrong, cold winter and scorching summer, virtues and vices. If he can stick to the principles of manliness, masculinity, indomitable will, patience, fortitude, tolerance and remain steady, firmly determined to overcome the odds and hazards surrounding him from within and without, he can be mighty in the truest sense of the term. One who yields to these enemies, retreats from the battlefield of life ; he is no better than a veritable coward. In other words, our genuine strength lies in mental strength that brings out our patience, fortitude, endurance and steadiness, and wins for us the laurel of triumph ; it builds up at the same time foundation of the religion of man, the hero, not that of the coward or villain.

A man has to bear with the violent blow of adversity. He has to proceed to the counter-attack against his foe, addiction to vice or sin with all his might. This is what is called struggle for existence in a greater sense. As combination of these qualities of patience, fortitude, endurance and steadiness equips a fighter with mental strength to face this struggle for existence and come out of it with flying colours, these qualities serve as a truly mighty weapon. Possessed of and embellished with these virtues, individual as well as collective life moves onward towards the goal.

Some of the exhilarating, earnest pithy sayings about patience, fortitude, endurance and steadiness, imparted either orally or in writing to the dejected and pessimistic persons, are here quoteworthy : "Don't lose either heart or hope, don't indulge in impatience. Rise and fall, good and bad fortune, hope and despondency, success and failure you are to face in the teeth of apparently unconquerable odds and hazards. Don't surrender to them".[9]

Again, "You are ever to get prepared to be true to the occasion to appear face to face with adverse circumstances of life like a valiant hero equipped with courage and forbearance. Perform your task with cheerfulness and exert yourself, render your service wherever needed and possible. Always remember that one who readily dedicates himself, his all, for attending to one's service once started, will be in dire need of forbearance or patience".[10]

Elsewhere, "If you try and try ever according to the injunctions and counsels of the Sangha-Lord, there shall be no dread of any danger or plight. Meditate on the Sangha-Lord, your Preceptor (Guru) at every breath and exhalation of inhaling air, you will never fall a victim to distractions and evil thoughts. Be firm and stick to your resolve and unwavering in your vow. no excitement of passions and senses shall have occasion to assail you".[11]

In order to inject new elixir and spiritual vitalism into the decaying national life, Acharyadev advised the Sangha-monks and numberless followers to reveal self-strength and might by building up an invigorating environment throughout the land with their selfless activities. He was fully confident that by rousing the

ideal of morality and right couduct and creating spiri-
tual fervour among the multitudes, dedicated souls like
them shall have to undertake a solemn vow for herald-
ing great re-generation and revival in this sacred land
of great heritage.

● In response to the eighth question "What are the real assets', Swamiji's deduction that self-conviction, self-dependence and self-dignity are the most invaluable assets to a votary in his onward march towards the bliss or illumination by exercise of austere religious practices, is also sovereign and universal. The firm faith that I am neither torpid nor worthless and that I am quite capable of fulfilling my aspiration and that of my fellow-beings, is what is self-conviction. And that persevering endeavour to stand firm on one's own strength and stamina without relying on others is what we call self-dependence. There goes the English adage with the same import that "Self-help is the best help". Who will lift me up unless I exert my best to do so ? Heaven helps these indeed who help themselves. Self-regard or self-dignity implies keeping faith or confidence in one's own strength, reverence and dignity that serves as a dependable safeguard against varied allurements, corruptions, decline or depravity. As a whole, one who is spirited with great viaticum or resources of self confidence, self-help and self dignity, can come out of the ordeals of life victoriously. Truth, dedication, self-control and temperance are the essential components of these genuine assets of spiritual necessities which make it easy for us to reach the goal of self-consciousness, self-realisation and salva-tion. There is exhortation of the Geeta that "one should ennoble oneself by one's own endeavours without degrading oneself"; because one's ownself is truly one's

friendly companion as well as hostile foe"[12] the echo of which we hear in Buddha's Dhammapada, the Practical Guide to Right Living: "One should first establish oneself in what is proper, then only should one instruct others,"[13] or, "One, truly, is the Master of oneself. For, who else a Master could be? With oneself fully controlled one gains a mastery which is hard to gain".[14]

Swami Pranavananda being the preceptor of very high magnitude adorned with self-realisation and self-elevation, was intent upon doing good for others and helping them to work out the strength already in man. And, in unison with this principle in the blazing spirit of his followers he says: "Let not neglect or forget that self-conviction and self-reliance which will be the beaconlight of your own self to attain the real self and conquer the entire nation". He gives a gentle reproof to them elsewhere to devote themselves self-confidently and self-dependently to the God-ordaind task with volatile readiness to work with swelling, unflagging force to proceed without being cowed down by despair and doubt.

The epoch-making Divine Seer and World-Teacher describes sliggishness, slumber, drowsiness, delayed action, state of being reluctant to move and act, carnality and sensual desires as our deadly foes in response to the ninth question. Active spirit, forceful feeling of admiration or interest and steadfast, constant effort to achieve something on the other hand have been delineated as genuine friends. What a novel exposition, what a grand revelation of the true identity of foes and friends! In the practical field, within and without 'the narrow domestic walls', there are so many, so diverse and queer advocates and adversaries we have to face. Those who cause harm to

us with animosity are our foes, and those who stand us in our need are friends and well-wishers. But more than these, positive hindrances like lethargy, slumber, idleness, nap or drowsiness, inactivity and sensuality which stand in our path of progress and realisation of all the aims and objects of life are undeniably our worst enemies; since these are far more formidable and pernicious than external adversaries. Weapons or arms cannot protect self from these enemies who ultimately prove detrimental to our all round development appearing in the guise of well-wishers and cowing us down with unexpected, sudden paroxysm, diverting our attention from the cherished goal and going on rampant with their furious onslaught to make us their poor, helpless victims so that we completely fall down. "Drop by drop is the water-pot filled. Likewise, the fool, gathering little by little, fills himself with evil and such potent foes"[15]—so states Lord Buddha in his Dhammapada. Again, Dhammapada promulgates: "Some are born in the womb, the wicked enemies are born in hell, the pious or righteous friends of energy, enthusiasm and perseverance go to heavens, the stainless ones unto Emancipation or Nirbana pass".[16]

Swami Vivekananda exhorts: "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached". Tennyson's memorable poem "Ulysses" also inspires us to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield'.

The ultimate goal of man being salvation through self-realisation, Swami Pranavananda emphasises the austere practice and procedural of energy, enthusiasm, perseverance as answer to the tenth and the last interrogation about the identity of the real friends for attaining this salvation through self-

discipline, self-restraint, continence, truthfulness and sacrifice. Acquisition and possession of all these attributes manifest the power that is inherent in man. "Don't allow priority to despair and dejection. Fortify your torn, tattered clothes with abundant agility, radiant spirit and persevering effort. The onus of inspiring hundreds and thousands of people with your noble, elevated ideals rests on you"—the invigorating, exhilarating message of Acharyadev pronounced to disappointed, disheartened souls we will accept as the summum bonum of our right living and thriving. Endowed with both popularly pragmatic and philosophic qualities, these universal ideals in aphorisms known as Sangha-Vani may be treated as the spiritual testament of the Acharya.

Each and every word of Acharyadev's 'Message of the Sangha' is compatible with every religion or 'ism' and awakens us from sluggishness, indolence, timidity and cowardice, incites us to move onward with a solemn vow towards the destination, the cherished goal, the summum bonum of our existence. The Sangha-Lord himself describes Sangha-Vani as an epitome of the essence of all that is to be had in the Vedas, the Geeta, the Puranas and Tantras. If we are emboldened to review throughly the Divine life of the Acharya, we can clearly see that every esoteric, mystic and practical word of Sangha-Vani has been translated into reality and fruition in his own life. There being no room for bias or bigotry in it and because of its rational, didactic nature it can be a positive solution to differences of opinion and dissensions, doing away with discords and strifes of various sects and communities and thereby liberating religion from the evil influence of the self-seekers. The only way left for the present Indians

staggering on the edge of oblivion and the mankind as a whole is to accept and pursue this everlasting, infinite and universal truth of truths.

If ever anything, should we say, can be looked upon as friend. philosopher and guide, it is Sangha-Vani or Sagha-Message. To the naive and unsophisticated, it stands as a sympathetic consultant, while to men of crudition overburdened with the weight of mere book-learning, its simple and enlightened truths leave an indelible impression, and to those who are in right earnest in quest of the primordial purity and immaculaeness of physique and mind, it serves indeed the purpose of a guide par excellence.

What we need to-day most is to have a reversal of direction, turning back to our glorious, noble past behind us, falling back upon the colossal spiritual-moral stature of this Supreme World-Master and Saint-Saviour for the elixir of inspiration to expedite the beneficial, universally good change of mind and soul to strive to reflect on and propound or settle the national as well as international problems of grave magnitude. Swami Pranavananda's apothegms impart courage and clarity, expectation and enthusiasm. India and the world so to say shall need these qualities in ever-growing measure as years roll on, and go forward to a more impressive, fruitful future.

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XI

THE GRAND FINALE : THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FADES

In the year 1940 there was a progressive deterioration in Acharyadev's health and his condition worsened his body was too unable to tolerate overstrain of his incessant, indefatigable exertions and bent downwards with rapidity, But he remained quite unconcerned for his mortal deterioration ; that the services of his Sangha or Divine Mission had assumed an immanent and complete shape of the life and nation-building project could be comprehended from what he said, "I have spared no pains to constitute and give motion to a universal Sangha for philanthropic services and all round welfare of humanity to cater to the needs of a crucial hour." Now he decided to merge in the Sangha body, a living organism of the society and the nation. An effulgence radiating from his forehead stood on the crown of his head, and the pilot of many a storm-tossed life, the living embodiment of love and Lord Shiva incarnate on earth shook off his spiral coil and evanesced in the other world or Eternity with his heavenly look fixed on Eternity on January 8, 1941, A,D. (corresponding to 24th Poush, the ninth month) in 1347 B.S. at 12.45 A.M.

The religious bent of mind and loving sympathy for all created beings that distinctively marked him out even as a laddie, ultimately resulted in a unique synthesis in his life of abnegation and annihilation of all earthly cravings with universal love.

The Divine Nation-Builder, who personified boundless prowess and virility, attempted at exhilarating a torpid, self-oblivious nation, especially the Hindus, the vast majority of the total population of India, with tireless energy, vigour, self-conviction and self-discipline to place it in an exalted status of universal recognition and honour. His imposing Milan Mandir and Samaj Samanvaya movements were directed to effect national integrity and selfless dedication of personal good for the whole. With malice for none, charity for all, having no care for the bare necessities of the body yet sharing the joys and sorrows of the world, a great Yogi practising religious austerities and emitting rays of love and bliss whereaver he moved and worked, the Acharya himself was indeed a luminious lustre the like of which we have rarely known or heard of.

Seers and apostles, Messiahs and Godmen are the saviours, mentors and guardians of mankind. Even after their demise they inspire the people with their idealism, conviction and courage. The world owes much to them for its progress. We are all aware that Acharyadev's aspired desire and iron will, creative power and manifold activities have spread far and wide through his Sangha and the flow of which will go on unhampered, unless and until the mission of national cohesion and universal unification based on spirituality is fully realised.

It is highly regrettable that in this epoch of gross materialism we have almost bidden adieu to spiritualism. It is disheartening to see one knocking one's head against a brickwall yet asserting that exposition of the secrets of spiritual existence is possible through the miscroscope or telescope of a man of science. We

fall upon the thorns of bleeding injury caused by the hard knock.

Religion, an integral part of the Indian Nation,—the very life-giving, sustaining force through the ages —has ever been the principal foundation of our national character. Each and every nation, however, has some ethos, certain distinctive singularity that acts as its life-force. "Is not it better to cling to one's national character than ail and suffer from degeneration trying to become outslandish in nature and temperament ?"— so rings the trampet-like voice of Lord Krishna in our ears from time immemorial. Subjugation to alien rule bringing with it political thraldom has almost sapped and eaten into the vitals of India's life-giving force. Again, our eyes marvelled at the dazzle and gaudy novelty of deceptive appearance of civilisation and culture of the West, of the marvels of its science and technology, which have made us blind to and forgetful of our perennial, old socio-spiritual-cultural ideas and ideals ; we are suffering from debasement and degeneration through apish imitation and adoption of atheism, Western flagrant materialism and biased notion that pleasure, sexual and selfish, is the chief good or leading principle of life. Is there none or nothing to save us from being carried along the negative, destructive path of an interbreeding culture without aim, purpose or self-eontrol ?

But that cannot be. The song of hope and regeneration—the poetry of optimism and 'Waiting for Godot'— is never dead. We have Saint-Saviour and magnanimous Prophet-Preceptor like Pranavanandaji whose invisibly visible presence and thundering call to the Nation and the whole of mankind as a guiding force will hold aloft

the true path of a viable, vivacious life vibrating with elan vital before our decaying, dying nation, so as to radiate the never-fading light of spiritualism and moral aspiration for a better, nobler life.

India has been nationally reborn with freedom from the fetters of political slavery or subjection to foreign imperialism. The middle-aged infant can survive only by transfusion of strength and stamina from the blood-bank of spiritualism. Strangely enough, our enlightened, educated fellow-beings do not care to recognise that religion has never directed us to ignore and remain indifferent to the material world ; in the palmy days of India when her spiritual greatness reached the summit, the world got wonder-struck with the splendour of her utilitarian excellence and material prospertity. India saw her savants and sages eulogising acquisition of property and affluence lawfully, honestly without depriving others of their due share and crying down idleness and servile flattery, failing which they would have invited quite a damaging disunity and dissonance between the haves and the have-nots. It is in this perspective that the human race, all over the world in all ages, has been in quest of the final answer to the question : Wherein lies the remedy ? The most revealing feature of the modern age lies in the ultimate solution of this most challenging query of man in the divine appearance of Swami Pranavananda and the message and endeavours emanating from his celestial personality—an unprecedented manifestation of the immortal spiritual heritage embodied in Sanatan Dharma of India. It is with this end in view that we have humbly essayed so far to present the marvellous, miraculous life-saga of Swami Pranavananda—a World-Teacher of high magnitude of the present era and of all times to come. He who in

purity of character, in utter fearlessness, in the acuteness and foresightedness of vision waged an inexorable, life-long battle for realisation of his own self as well as for national re-building, could not be satisfied merely with attainment of his own emancipation but it was the wordless cry of his heart for promotion and well-being of suffering millions and their salvation as a whole. Intellectuals, elites, young learners, nationals and members of the human race are earnestly requested to study and enlighten their fellow-beings with the memorable saga and priceless sayings of such a dedicated sonl. At this crucial hour let the omnipotent and omniscient, All-kind and all All-immanent Power descend on earth in the mortal shape of Swami Pranavananda once again. Let him come down amidst us to convey to us all his loud, clear, cheering and ambrosial promulgation—"This is the epoch of universal awareness and realisation ; this is the era of universal adaptability and co-existence ; this is the age of universal amity and integrity ; this is the time of universal emancipation."

Lord Krishna Himself appeared in the vital role of charioteer and protagonist in the great battle of Kurukshetra and emboldened the gallant Pandava warrior Arjuna with gentle reproof or mild warning when the latter succumbed to paralysis of judgement and dejection on the arena. This, we know, form the essence of Srimat Bhagawat Geeta, the immortal chant of spiritual inspiration, of manliness and virility of all ages. Similarly, Acharya Pranavananda's exhilarating admonitions to his associates, followers and the multitudes stand as the fountain-head of religiosity, manhood and manliness to mankind.

Pranavanandaji's supreme success lies in his re-

pronouncement of the all-enveloping spirituality of the Vedanta, synthesis of Bhaktiyoga (path of devotion), Karmayoga (path of action) and Jnana-yoga (path of wisdom), and demonstration of Religion as the summum bonum of all. He fervently expected and desired to see India strive for higher and still higher to reach the height of self-revelation and make positive contribution to world-civilisation by re-instating her glorious heritage and history. His reflections and endeavours in this regard in strengthening the nation with noble aspiration and earnest zeal—the nation that must needs be equipped with these attributes all the more with the passage of time to have the desired effect or object—self-consciousness, cosmic energy and salvation through self-emuncipation—beggar description. Spiritual masters and saviours of his type are really the makers of millions in their life and after their demise.

On the eve of our undertaking a liberated life of nation-building towards the close of the 19th century and throughout the first four decades of the 20th, Swamiji guided the Indian Nation with such a mission as anybody else seldom did. In his heroic venture spirituality and socio-humanitarian services coupled with pragmatic outlook and readincss to will and act for the nation and humanity go paired. We can face and outstep the embarrassingly problematic welter of disruption and diversity with amazing plenty of our spiritual treasure, scarcely put into practice. A harmonious synchronisation of the ideal and the real, divine vision and its realisation for humanity's sake, socio-religio-philanthropic services homologous to Communism and Socialism he inherited from age-old tradition. All that he perceived, willed and performed can be a tangible, dynamic force to metamorphose men's nature,

make them pure, morally and physically potent and always prepared to extirpate many and diverse sorts of differences, dissensions or evils and extricate mankind from the mundane miseries. We can look forward with conviction and hope left by the guide and guarantor of the modern national resurgence and to quote Romain Rollan's apt expression "a universe soul" Acharya Pranavananda after Ram Mohan Roy, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda that this sacred, glorious land of ours will be a worthy legatee of her all out superb cultural refinements for ennobling herself and the world.

While dwelling on India's gift to the world Swami Vivekananda pronounced with exhortation, ".. the philosophy and spirituality of India is ever ready to flow along the new-made channels into the veins of the nations of the world. The Hindu's calm brain must pour out its own quota to give to the sum total of human progress. India's gift to the world is the light spiritual". Swami Pranavananda through his unwearying life-long activities and messages of life-building, Sangha-building and nation-building poured out our own quota – our abundant unbounded spiritual wealth – to the world.

Under modern conditions of decadence his messages can be a dependable, practical guide-post to the nation. Universal in character, these are the unerring, unfailing props that can cure the world too of its maladies and enable men get rid of mortal afflictions and obliterate their teethering of thraldom. That these may be treated as the Vedas or revelations of the Absolute in words goes unquestioned. Majesty of the Supreme

Being merges with the Supreme Soul and becomes one, indivisible ; the Sangha-Lord and his pithy sayings are also one and unseverable.

Acharyadev's apothegms, we believe confidently, can serve as a panacea for malaise and 'to be or not to be' question—the veritable problems of this age of gross materialism, scientific and technological advancement—the epoch in which though distance of space and time is annihilated and man is on the run from planet to planet, yet torn with sick, hurry, divided aims and fatal fever, fret and restlessness. It was he who found way out and remedy of these ailments in his superb aphorisms ; these manifest the inner voice of the human soul not only within but without his country : What are the needs of the hour ? The answer we repeat once again—"universal awakening, universal synthesis, universal unification and universal salvation"—in which an impartial, unbiased scrutineer will discover at ease universality and positive, sure solutions. Inquisitive persons of modern socio-economic political 'isms' or ideologies will also be assured of solution to their different problems and issues.

Swamiji's aphorisms are of invaluable aid not only to our own nation but to other nations to-day because of the fact that courage and clarity, expectation and enthusiasm are generated therefrom that we all need so indispensably in ever changing measure with the succeeding passage of time and the nations including ours will become completely self-conscious and dynamic, tolerant and forbearing.

The very Shiva, God of gods, who incarnated himself in Shankaracharya, appeared once again as the Epoch-making Seer and proclaimed the universal,

all-comprehensive apothegms of synthesis and unification, integration and emancipation. And Acharyadev voiced forth the inner voice of his soul to the Hindus of all castes and creeds to arouse and enliven them from their prolonged imbecility and self-oblivion and make them fully aware of their divine power for shouldering the onus of God-ordained duties towards universal welfare.

His clarion call echoes and reaches all over the world with this intrepid incantation that "India will not slumber for long more ; she will leave insensate slumber, rise again one day (may it please Acharyadev that it come soon !), shine in all the glory of its pristine magnificence and brightness and occupy the prime seat of the World-Teacher like Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavananda.

A Saviour of the West said to his followers, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven". The celestial life, miraculously dynamic activities and life-building, Sangha-building and nation-building exhilarating apothegms of the Cosmic Humanist—the World-Preceptor and Saint-Saviour Swami Pranavananda inflame inextinguishable light whose resplendence shows us the right path.

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